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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN ®

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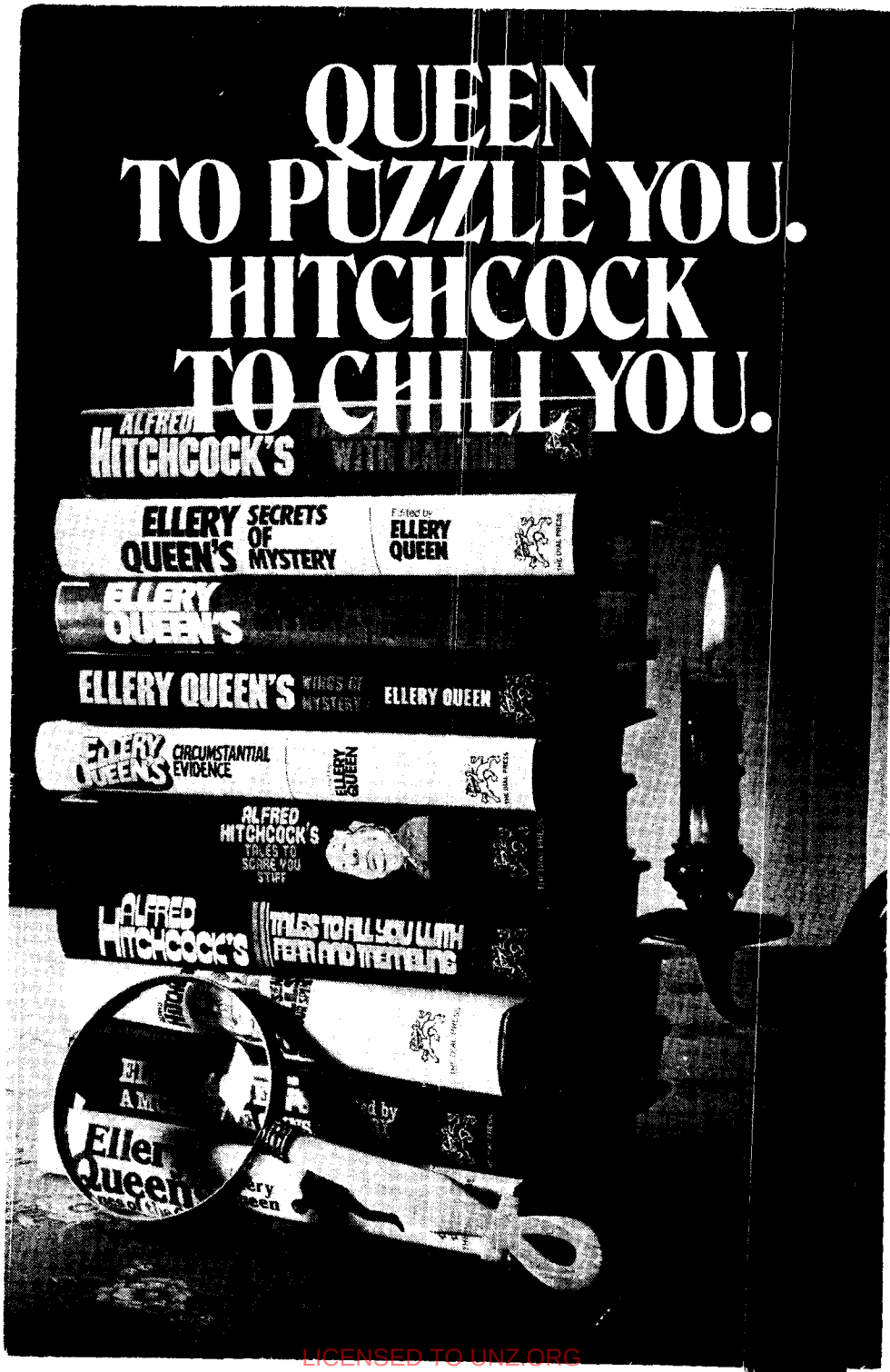

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MOUSIE

by ROBERT TWOHY

"HEY!"

Dave Haskell looked. Virgil Cooney jerked his big chin at him. Dave didn't want to go over—Pie Caps were always pulling stuff.

Four red and four white wedges, the points coming together at a red button on top. Floppy cocky-looking caps—all the big wheels wore them. It meant you belonged to the Cardinal Club, and rated. Cooney rated, all right—All-County last year, and the *Times* said he was one of the best defensive linemen in Powell High School history.

Dave tried to pretend he didn't know what Cooney's jerk of the chin meant. But Cooney wasn't about to let him get away with that. "*HEY!*"

So Dave went over, stopping six feet away, wondering what Cooney was going to pull.

Cooney leaned back on the grass. The frizz-haired girl sitting next to him wore sticky purplish lipstick, twisted upward like she was barely keeping from laughing. Dave didn't know her—she must be a new junior or senior transfer to Powell High.

Cooney said, "Well? You just gunna stand there?"

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Dave didn't know what Cooney wanted him to say. Dave's throat was tight like it got whenever a Pie Cap zeroed in on him. Standing there in front of big muscular Cooney, he felt fear, and shame for being what he was—108 pounds, with narrow shoulders and not much coordination and wearing thick glasses and having the voice he had.

"This is a *lady* I ast you to meet!" Cooney scowled, then shot his little eyes at the girl to see if she was catching on that he was being clever in a funny way. "Doncha know how to say hello?"

"Hello."

"Doncha tell her you're glad to meet her?"

When you were little you could turn and run. But at 15 if you did that, tomorrow everyone would know about it and look at you and grin the way they did. It was bad to have to talk, with his throat tight, but worse to run.

"I'm glad to meet you."

"Louder! Say it so she can hear you."

"I'm glad to meet you!"

Cooney grinned as the girl gave a gurgly spurt of laughter—"Oh, what a cute li'l voice!"

"I tole you. Suits him perfeck, don't it?"

"It's darlin'!" Her eyes were bright, her sticky mouth stretched wide. "Great big eyes and cute li'l nose—an' like he's twitchin' all over. A sweet li'l, scared li'l mousie!"

Cooney looked pleased with the way things had gone. He lay back on the grass. The girl's laughter died out and she lay back too, the joke over. Dave was dismissed. So he walked away, and didn't run into any more Pie Caps the five blocks to his house.

He got some milk and the pack of Suzie-Q's from the refrigerator and after he finished them, went in the living room and turned on the TV; but the afternoon movie running on Channel 2 was one he'd seen and hadn't liked much. He went in his room and thought he might study some history for a while, but it was boring and he closed the book before finishing a page. He took off his glasses and his shoes and turned on the radio and lay down on the bed and listened to music, and after a while he fell asleep.

The Taylors had come over. They lived two blocks away, on Hatch Street. Mr. Taylor was tall and fat. Mrs. Taylor was thin, with wide blue eyes that made her look not too bright. They had a couple of small daughters, so she didn't work, and Dave had heard her tell

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his mother once that she couldn't hold down a job, she had just enough brains to be a housewife. Maybe, but she was nice.

Mr. Taylor had said, "How's school going, Dave?" then turned toward the drink Dave's father was holding out, forgetting he'd asked the question.

Mrs. Taylor smiled and Dave smiled back, then went in his room.

He got through three pages of history, then turned on the radio and got in bed, not sleepy but with nothing else to do. An old Bogart movie was on which he'd have watched if the Taylors hadn't come over—his father would have let him because no sports were on tonight, and probably would have watched it with him, because he liked Bogart too.

His father was all right, and decent enough with Dave. So was his mother Denise. But sometimes they looked at him like trying to figure how come *he* was their son instead of someone else.

Bogart had that good raspy voice, very cool, and you knew his throat never got tight. Dave wondered how he had got to be so tough and cool, without ever being scared of anyone . . .

He woke up, having to go to the bathroom. Turning in the hall he heard Mr. Taylor's voice saying how inflation was ruining the little man. But why should Mr. Taylor care? All that fat—he wasn't a little man.

Dave looked in the mirror, pretending that this time the reflection he saw would be different. When he was little he'd done that, only he wasn't pretending then—he'd believed it would really happen. Of course it never had—never would.

Under the thick glasses his brown eyes seemed to stick out. Maybe it was the glasses made them look like that. With the glasses off, he couldn't see if they stuck out or not.

Once he'd asked his mother—a long time ago, when he still asked her things—"Do my eyes stick out?"

"Oh, appearances aren't the big thing, Davey. The big thing is, do you see all right with those new glasses? They don't give you headaches, do they?"

No, they didn't give him headaches. And he didn't ask her again if his eyes stuck out. Maybe they didn't, not too much—maybe it *was* just the glasses.

Short nose, small thin mouth, chin that went in, thin neck—"Hey, Mouse, eat your heart out! Look what *I* got! She's cute, ain't she?" "Uh, sorry, fella, didn't hear you—will you squeak louder, please?" Ha ha ha, giggle giggle.

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He went back toward his room. His father said, "I wouldn't have one in the house." Dave stopped at his door, listened.

Mr. Taylor said, "The way things have got, I figure a man should have one and be ready to use it."

Dave's mother said, "This is still a safe town."

"No town's safe any more."

"I wouldn't want Sam to get one."

"Laura was nervous too, at first, the way you two are. But you're not any more, are you, Laura?"

"What? Oh. No, I don't even think of it any more."

Dave's father said, "Well, my opinion is that—hey, aren't we ready for another drink?"

Mrs. Taylor said that two were her limit. Mr. Taylor said that if Dave's father was going to have one, he'd have one.

Dave stood at his door as Mrs. Taylor murmured about something she had seen at Sturbridge's, a lovely little thing, whatever it was. He wanted to hear more about what his father wouldn't have one in the house. He thought he'd hear more when his father came back with the drinks—because his father hadn't given his opinion yet.

Mrs. Taylor went on about the lovely little thing, then Mr. Taylor said, "Ah, that's a good rich color—thanks, Sam," and Dave's father said as Mrs. Taylor stopped murmuring, "My opinion is that they're too dangerous to have around. Particularly with the kid in the house."

At school you were the mouse, at home you were the kid. Dave Haskell, the Mouse Kid.

He got a blinding sharp pain in his hand. He looked and saw he'd slammed it against the door frame. For a second he was shocked, bewildered—he'd never done anything like that.

Then a chilly feeling seemed to come up inside him—what? Excitement? Like, something was going to happen—something he'd been waiting for? What? He heard far-off sounds, like a slow, steady drum roll.

Then the sounds were gone. And the feeling, whatever it was, was gone.

He stared at his hand. It wasn't cut. He held it tight with his other hand, squeezed the hurt away. There must have been no noise, or just a soft thump on the door frame. In the living room the voices went on. Mr. Taylor was talking—

"... careful, sure. I don't leave it where the girls might get at it. It's up high, way back on top of the cabinet in the living room."

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"I'd think you'd keep it in a locked box in the garage."

"No, I want it where I can get at it, in the main part of the house. Crimes aren't just late at night any more."

"Can't the girls see it up there?"

"No way. That's a tall cabinet, you know, and there's that ledge around it. Even if they stood on a chair they couldn't see it. They don't even know I got it."

"I suppose you bring it in the bedroom at night."

"You know it. Put it on the floor right next to me."

"Loaded?"

"Sure."

"Well . . ." Dave heard a clink of ice, and his father gave a whooshy sigh. "My opinion, I don't want one. You read too much about a kid finds a gun, starts fooling around with it, and—boom!"

"I respect how you feel. I feel like *I* feel."

Dave's father said he respected that.

That ended the talk about it. They got on the price of gas, and how ten years ago you filled your tank for $5 at a cheapo station, and got change.

Dave went in his room, closed the door. He got in bed, wondering what that chill, like excitement, like something was going to happen, had meant. Or had it meant anything?

Into his head flashed what Mr. Hooper had droned at freshman orientation—"Knowledge is power."

So he had knowledge that Mr. Taylor kept a gun on top of the cabinet in his living room. So? What did that mean to him? Anything? Nothing?

"Knowledge is power," Mr. Hooper droned again.

Power.

The chill came again. He sat up in bed.

Power was when you had knowledge that no one knew you had.

He sat there, shivering—then the chill was gone. And his thought about power seemed to crumble and fall away.

He lay down, with a feeling like something had been held out to him, almost given to him, then had been pulled away.

He felt very tired suddenly, wanted to sleep. But a memory came to him. He didn't want it; he rolled over, sat up, shook his head, tried to shake it away. But it wouldn't go. It stood off, until he lay down again, then it came pushing back, pushing into his mind . . .

The last time he'd sat at a table in the Dunk Shop. Two months ago, at the start of the term.

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The Dunk Shop had good thick doughnuts and you could sit at one of the crowded little tables and hear music from the jukebox and people talking about teachers and funny and weird things that had happened at school. The bald little man who owned the place was nice. When he gave Dave his doughnut and grapeade he'd slip him a wink. Just like he did everybody. It made Dave feel he wasn't different from the others.

He'd sit down and eat and listen to the chatter. Everyone was talking or eating or listening to others or to the music and nobody bothered him. He was just another sophomore sitting there. He felt safer there than he ever did in a classroom, where people get tense or bored and might look around for someone to zero in on.

A freshman who was in Dave's Spanish class—named Longley or something like that—had seen all the little tables crowded, and carried his milk and a maple bar over to the big round table in the middle and taken the empty chair to the left of Dick Wodgett, the senior-class president who Dave had heard girls say was the best-looking man at Powell.

Dave and others sitting at the little tables could hardly believe it. Because everybody knew that after school the big round table was reserved just for Pie Caps.

Even if there were no other chairs at the small tables, you didn't sit there, not at the big round table. You stood at the counter along the wall.

It wasn't a school rule. It was just something that had started, and gone on.

But Longley must not have known it. There he sat, with his neat dorky-looking haircut, the only one at the table not wearing a floppy, cocky Pie Cap.

Five of them were there, and they all stopped talking and laughing and moving around, and turned and looked at the freshman. No expression, no word, nothing—just five pairs of eyes looking at him.

All the other tables were quiet now. Everybody was looking, wondering what the Pie Caps would do. Virgil Cooney was one of the five.

The bald little man had his back turned, stacking cans in the drink cooler. With the jukebox going he hadn't noticed that all the chatter had stopped.

Longley said, "Hi," and tried a smile, and nothing changed on any of the faces around the table. They just went on looking at him, not moving.

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He looked suddenly scared—his face got red. He ducked it and sucked on his straw and the drink went down the wrong way. He choked, and sprayed a little, and a few drops landed on Dick Wodgett's hand on the table to Longley's right.

Wodgett looked at the drops on his hand. So did the freshman. He breathed short and fast through his lips.

Lola Burke, who had a state rating in women's tennis, gave a short giggle, then her face got set again and she stared at Longley like everyone else at the table.

Wodgett went on not saying anything. Longley's shoulders had got all bunched up. He said, his voice high and shaky, "Gee, I'm sorry."

Wodgett stared back at him.

Longley didn't know what to do. He just breathed hard and fast and looked back at Wodgett.

Slowly Wodgett reached his other hand to the paper-napkin thing in the middle of the table, pulled a napkin, and dropped it by his hand.

"D'you want me to wipe it?" Longley asked.

Wodgett didn't say anything, or move.

Longley picked up the napkin and wiped Wodgett's hand.

The bald owner became aware of the silence, turned around, noticed that everybody was looking at something. He looked too, and saw the freshman with the white face and bunched shoulders, cleaning off Dick Wodgett's hand.

Longley stopped wiping and asked, "Is that all right?"

Wodgett nodded slowly.

Longley pushed back his chair and got up. He said to everybody at the table, "I'm sorry." Then he turned and went fast out of the Dunk Shop, leaving his maple bar that he hadn't touched.

Lola Burke gave a yell of laughter and in a second everyone at the table was laughing and Virgil Cooney was leaning across and pulling off Dick Wodgett's Pie Cap and slapping it back on his head, and Dick whooped, and shot his eyes around and seeing them all laughing looked pleased.

Then people at the little tables were laughing, because it seemed to be what you should do. If you stayed quiet you'd stand out and be different. A few didn't join in laughing but nearly everyone did—and it *was* funny, how Longley had wiped off Wodgett's hand and then hurried out, leaving his maple bar which Wodgett and Norma Heffner, of Senior Prom Committee, were now sharing—and

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how he'd looked so dorky and scared. Dave felt good to be in with the Pie Caps on a laugh on somebody else.

Then everyone began to notice how the bald owner was looking at the Pie Caps, and they and everyone gradually got quiet.

The owner said, "I don't like that much. You people can be pretty mean."

Norma Heffner said, "Mean? How were we mean?" She had large dark eyes and a way of looking at someone very sincerely. She was a very well-developed girl.

The owner said, "Anybody wants, can sit at that table."

"Certainly," said a tall smooth-looking Pie Cap who Dave didn't know who he was, the fifth of them at the table. "We didn't tell that child he couldn't sit here."

"Nobody said a word," said Lola Burke.

"Well, let's have it clear—that table's for anybody, any time."

"Sure." Dick Wodgett switched his eyes around and Dave had a sick feeling they'd settle on him. They did. "Do *you* want to sit here, Mou—sorry, I mean whatever your name is—do you? Fine. Come on over." He smiled. Dave thought of a sleek cat.

His throat was tight. He got up. "I got to get going." He saw Norma Heffner's lips twitch and it was because of his voice of course. He left, and supposed that he looked just about like Longley had looked—not quite running but almost. He heard laughter behind him, not loud now because of what the owner had said, but even blocks away from the shop he still heard it, soft and slippery, sliding around in his head.

He felt hatred for Longley for having started this scene that had ended coming down on him, and ruined the Dunk Shop for him. He'd been a fool to think it was ever a safe place, that there was any place he could be safe from them . . .

That was the memory. This wasn't the first time it had come pushing into his head. It wasn't his worst memory—he had lots of worse ones. He wondered why this one in particular kept coming back. Each time it came, it had to run through to the end. Now it had ended.

Now he hoped he could stop thinking things and go to sleep.

Leaving school next day he didn't see any Pie Caps. Thursday was a meeting day and most of them were at the various clubs they ran, or at baseball or track or swimming practice.

The afternoon movie was half over but it was a Western, so he

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turned it on. It was a very old movie, with an actor Dave didn't know, with a face he liked—the face of someone who wouldn't shove anyone around but wouldn't let anyone shove him. He was riding a white horse across a field, with trees and cattle around and beautiful misty hills in the distance. Dave thought how good it would be to live in those times, when if you wanted to get away from someplace you just got on your horse and in two minutes were by yourself with nothing but fields and hills around, nobody you had to be afraid of.

But the cowboy was like Bogart—he didn't know fear. He hitched his white horse to a rail and went in a saloon. It was in a new town. Three cowboys were at the bar—hard, mean-looking. They stared at him and he didn't look nervous or anything, just walked up to them, slow. His eyes were a little narrower but that was the only change in his face. He said in a deep voice, "I've been ridin' a long way, after the man that murdered my brother."

One of them had eyes that looked crazy. "Have you, stranger?" It was a sneer.

They looked at each other and the cowboy looked crazier. Nothing changed in the stranger's face except the eyes narrowed a little more. "Yes. But I don't think I'll have to ride much further."

One of the other cowboys pulled a gun. The stranger had his gun out in one quick move and it roared and the cowboy with the gun was flopping backward. The other two cowboys had their guns out but they didn't stand a chance. The stranger got them so fast it was one long roar from his gun. He went on one knee by the crazy one who gasped, "It wasn't me ordered your brother shot! I swear it!"

"Who was it? Who hired you to shoot Ted?"

"It was—" Then the man's head jerked and he swallowed once and died.

Dave watched the rest of the movie and the stranger found out who had ordered Ted's murder and they had a gunfight, and the stranger finally nailed the killer. Then with a sad but kind of peaceful expression he got on his horse and slowly rode away.

Dave turned off the set and went into his room and got his Spanish book, but the saloon scene from the movie kept coming between his eyes and the print. He closed the book and took off glasses and shoes and lay down on the bed and drifted into a kind of dream . . .

They saw him come in and their lips started to twitch. The small tables were empty but he walked right up to the big round table and looked at them—there were eight, ten of them, all in their Pie

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Caps—and said, his voice low and steady, "I think I'll just have my doughnut and my grapeade here."

Lola Burke's mouth dropped open. Norma Heffner's beautiful eyes were stretched wide.

He looked at her and said in that same low voice, "Would you like to share my doughnut with me?"

Suddenly they were all shouting and jumping around, and Dick Wodgett threw a huge jar of something at him, and liquid splashed all around but didn't get on him. Girls were screaming. Virgil Cooney flew across the table and tried to kick him with his football shoe, but Dave twisted away. Then they threw their Pie Caps at him, and the caps were huge and heavy but he dodged them all. The bald man behind the counter was yelling that they shouldn't be so mean.

Then Dave pulled his gun and saw how scared they were of him as he fired, so quick it was just one long roar—and they were falling, slowly, some on the table, others on the floor. He knelt by Norma Heffner, and she whispered, "I never really knew you." He held her head in his arms and she closed her eyes and smiled and died . . .

Dave got up. He thought he had been dreaming a long time, but the kitchen clock said not even 4:00 yet.

He felt hot, sticky. He touched his face, and it was damp with warm sweat.

He went in the bathroom, unbuttoned his shirt, put cold water on his face, his chest, put on his glasses, looked in the mirror.

His nose looked like it had taken on a shape. Under his mouth, which looked firm, his chin looked square. He pushed his jaw forward, squaring it more. His eyes behind the glasses didn't stick out at all—they had a flat narrow look.

Inside him it was like a drum was beating, slow and steady.

He said out loud, "Something's happened."

His voice sounded low and clear. His throat didn't feel tight.

He got the bag that his mother had bought for him to carry his schoolbooks in, that he had quickly learned not to use because only dorks carried book bags. He put a couple of books in it, and carrying it went out of the house, the drumbeat sounding, slow and steady, he walking up the street to the sound of it.

He walked two blocks to Hatch Street, saw four little girls playing on the grass in front of a house down the street. Two of them were the Taylor girls.

"David?"

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He muttered, "Mrs. Taylor, I was walking and don't feel so good. Can I use the bathroom?"

"Of course!" Her wide blue eyes showed kindness. "What's the matter? Can I—?"

"No, I just—" He shook his head.

"You go right ahead, Davey. You know where it is."

With his book bag he walked down the hall to the bathroom, closed the door, gave a few loud coughs, and made gagging noises, then ran the water a while, gave some sighs, looked at his reflection in the mirror, felt good at what he saw. He came out, with the bag. She came into the hall from the kitchen. "Do you feel any better?"

"Oh, yeah. Could I sit down for a little?"

"Why, certainly." She came into the living room with him. He took the chair near the big cabinet that held fancy dishware. She said, "You look a little pale. Maybe I should call Denise at work."

"Oh, no. All it is—" He gave a grin like he was ashamed. "I ate a couple of doughnuts, they must have gone down wrong."

"You should eat doughnuts very slowly. I won't offer you anything to eat—"

"No, I don't want anything. But maybe just a few sips of milk?"

She said, looking uncertain, "I'm not sure you should have anything for a while. Oh, I don't see how a little milk could hurt you."

She went into the kitchen and Dave got out of the chair and put his book bag on it and stepped up on the bag and looked and saw the gun at the other side of the cabinet, at the back. He stepped off the chair and sat down and had the bag on his lap when she came in with a glass of milk.

"Drink it slow."

He said, "I'm feeling much better . . . That was really dumb of me."

"People can get very sick, all in a second."

Dave sipped the milk. She had taken a chair. She asked about school. He answered her questions. He heard his voice, the difference in it—his voice sounded steady and calm. He wondered if she had noticed the difference. Probably not—she was nice but not very bright, like she'd said. She wouldn't notice things. If a boy she knew came to the door unexpectedly she wouldn't think it was anything more than what he said, that he wasn't feeling well. She would think it was nice that he would feel at home enough to come to her house to use her bathroom. When he left she wouldn't look to see if any-

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thing was missing. She'd said last night that she never thought any more of what was on the cabinet.

There was a little clock on a near table. It was nearly 4:30. School meetings would be over and the Pie Caps would be sitting at the big round table in the Dunk Shop.

He got up. "Thanks, Mrs. Taylor." He had opened his book bag, was reaching around in it, and looking worried. "Huh."

She had got up. "What's the matter?"

"There's this paper I'm s'posed to study. I thought I had it." He kept fishing in the bag. "I had it when I left school."

"Could you have left it in the bathroom?"

"Well, I—"

"You carried the bag in there."

"Well—it's not in here."

He kept searching in the bag. She said, "I'll take a look," and trotted out of the living room.

Dave went fast to the far side of the cabinet and reached up over the ledge and got the gun and laid it in the bag and snapped the bag closed. He walked into the hall, calling, "Mrs. Taylor, I found it."

"Oh, good." She smiled at him from the bathroom.

"Thanks again."

"You be sure and not eat doughnuts too fast."

"I won't."

She went to the door after him.

Such a nice little boy he was—so kind of touching, with those scared, bulging eyes and that squeaky voice—like a little mouse. She supposed that at school things were difficult for him sometimes—young people can be cruel, which they don't mean to be of course. But Davey would get through the hard years of growing up, and there'd be a place for him in the world.

She looked down the block, saw her girls playing, and was grateful that they were pretty and healthy. Good genes, and good care, love and attention. Careers were fine, but career women didn't know what they missed. Like Davey's mother, Denise—an office manager now, and she certainly liked her work—but had she ever had the chance to know and really love her son?

THE SURVIVORS: *Lola Burke*, 18, senior, captain women's tennis, member Cardinal and other clubs, shot in right hip. Extensive damage, will recover, will have permanent limp.

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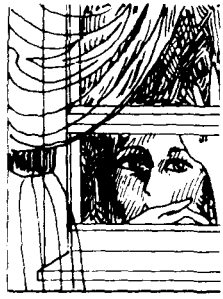
Richard Wodgett, 18, senior class president, member Cardinal and other clubs, shot in face. Plastic surgery required.

Virgil Cooney, 19, senior, football letterman, member Cardinal and other clubs, shot in spine. Paralyzed chest down. No recovery.

Norma Heffner, 18, senior, member Cardinal and other clubs, minor bullet wound, left shoulder. Treated at hospital, released.

THE DEAD: *Juanita Higgins*, 14, freshman, member Friendly Neighbors Club, shot through heart, died instantly.

David Haskell, 15, sophomore, no clubs, shot through brain, died instantly.



DETECTIVERSE

A MESSAGE FROM LAS VEGAS

by FRANK ANTHONY

My luck with the dice went from bad to worse,
It almost seemed I played under a curse.
I lost scads of money,
But don't worry, honey,
I'll recoup by writing Detectiverse.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Mr. Leonard Strang: by vocation, a science teacher at Aldershot High School; by avocation, an amateur detective, a crime consultant, a solver of puzzles and problems. It's purely wonderful how the crusty old gnome combines his two callings—the science of the classroom and the science of deduction. . .

MR. STRANG GRASPS AT STRAWS

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

It was a cold, raw evening, and a dreary rain pattered against the windows of Mr. Strang's rented room. The gnomelike teacher sat at a table, muttering in annoyance as he marked a batch of test papers written by ninth graders, most of whom seemed blithely ignorant of what had been going on in class during the previous three weeks.

Thomas Avila Edson was the frist man who invented the light blub.

For a moment Mr. Strang pondered the good fortune which made Edson the "frist" man to invent the mysterious and somewhat menacing "blub". How many others had invented similar "blubs" after Thomas A. Edson's triumph?

"Ctenophora!" the teacher grumbled in annoyance as his blue pencil flicked across the page like the tongue of an adder, deducting two points here, giving partial credit there, and elsewhere sketching a gigantic question mark indicating his total mystification.

Downstairs, Mrs. Mackey was watching television—a police show, judging by the shots, explosions, sirens, and general rough-and-tumble that reached Mr. Strang's ears. "Now ye've nabbed the dirthy

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spalpeen," he heard his landlady cry out in a rich brogue, "give ut to him good. Bite the rogue's ear off!"

The front doorbell rasped loudly. Mrs. Mackey's reluctant footsteps as she left her beloved TV were followed by the sound of the bolt being pulled back and then the door creaking open on unoiled hinges.

"Detective Roberts," cooed Mrs. Mackey. "An' what brings out Aldershot's foinest on a night like this?" A mumble of male voices, then: "Take off them wet coats, the both uv ye. His lordship's up in his room."

Heavy footsteps on the stairs were followed by a knock at Mr. Strang's door.

"Come in."

Paul Roberts was the first to enter. The bulky detective sergeant and the diminutive teacher had a profound respect for one another. Mr. Strang had given unofficial assistance on a number of Roberts' cases, and the teacher's intuitive logic was an appreciated complement to the dogged police work of the detective.

The man who came in just behind Roberts was a stranger to Mr. Strang. He was of medium height, and his close-cropped hair was slightly mussed. In dress and demeanor he was the very model of a conservative businessman. In a crowd of commuters he would have been almost invisible.

Mr. Strang took their wet coats and hung them on the back of the door. The stranger sank down in the big easy chair and Roberts perched on the edge of the bed.

"Mr. Strang, meet Michael Marcos," said Roberts by way of introduction. "Mike's with the F.B.I. We're working together on a—well, a problem."

"Grasping at straws is more like it," growled Marcos.

"The F.B.I., eh?" Mr. Strang took his pipe from the table. "Tell me, Mr. Marcos, have I been caught double parking again?" He lit the pipe and puffed clouds of pungent smoke into the still air. "Or do you suspect me of cheating Mrs. Mackey out of her rent?"

Marcos' face might have been carved in granite. "Eugene Allerdyce," he said in a flat voice. "What can you tell me about him?"

Mr. Strang turned to Roberts with a chuckle. "Your friend certainly doesn't waste time on the social niceties, Paul," he said. Then he turned to Marcos, scratching his head.

"Eugene Allerdyce. I had him as a student. But that was nine or

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ten years ago. He went into politics, I believe. I read about him in the newspaper from time to time. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind that. What can you remember about him? From when you taught him?"

Mr. Strang looked from Roberts to Marcos and back again. "Mr. Marcos," he said, every inch the stern teacher, "I have no way of knowing whether your churlish mannerisms are inborn or simply assumed for my benefit. In either event they do not impress me. But if you want any further information from me, I'd suggest you begin treating me as a sapient adult old enough to be your father, rather than a particularly backward child. You might begin by telling me what in blazes is going on here."

Mr. Strang glared at the F.B.I. agent while Roberts hid a grin behind his hand.

"I don't think we can—" began Marcos.

"Two days ago Eugene Allerdyce was kidnaped," said Roberts at the same time.

Marcos let out a long breath. "Paul," he said softly, "I don't think it was wise to let that information out."

"We're here to pick Mr. Strang's brain for information about Allerdyce," Roberts replied. "How's he going to know the kind of information we're looking for unless we let him in on the whole story?"

"But he's not a trained detective—"

"Oh?" Mr. Strang peered at Marcos over the tops of his glasses. "Well, how's this for detective work, Mr. Marcos? Allerdyce was kidnaped, but you haven't made the news public yet. The kidnapers are demanding some kind of ransom which the powers that be are unwilling to pay. Furthermore, while you don't know for certain where Allerdyce is being held, you do have some clue as to his whereabouts. But the clue makes no sense to you, and you're looking for something—anything—in his past life that would give the clue meaning. Right so far?"

Marcos gave Roberts a look that would etch glass. "Paul, have you been talking to this guy?"

"I have no data about the kidnaping except what I've heard from you," snapped Mr. Strang.

"But the ransom?"

"Ransom is inherent in any kidnaping. And if you'd been willing to pay it, Allerdyce would probably be free right now."

"But the clue. How'd you know about that?"

"By your presence here, Mr. Marcos. In your own words, you're

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'grasping at straws.' You come to me to seek information on a man I haven't seen in ten years. For background? You could get that anywhere, without paying me a visit on a stormy evening. No, you want something specific. So you're out on a fishing expedition. You're contacting anybody who ever knew Allerdyce—no matter how slightly—to get it. Therefore, there's a clue—a clue that's still something of a mystery."

Roberts grinned at the slightly flustered Marcos. "Satisfied, Mike?" asked the detective. "Now why don't you lay out the whole thing for Mr. Strang?"

"I—okay," said Marcos reluctantly. "Eugene Allerdyce is a personal aide to Governor Hindeman. A real brainy kid, young Allerdyce. He's going places in politics."

"Yes," said Mr. Strang. "But what about the kidnaping?"

"It happened the day before yesterday. Allerdyce was in Ravensport, laying the groundwork for a new poverty program there. A program, I might add, that involves four million dollars."

"Can we get to the kidnaping itself?" asked Mr. Strang with a sigh.

"He was taken right out of his hotel room. From what we can make out, at least two men came into the room some time around nine in the evening. They held Allerdyce there for three or four hours."

"How do you know that?"

"The ashtrays were full of two kinds of cigarette butts. And Allerdyce doesn't smoke. We figure the men were waiting for people on the floor to go to sleep so the halls would be clear. Then they went out the back way, taking Allerdyce with them."

"No witnesses, I suppose?" asked the teacher.

"None. But the following morning the governor's office got a phone call. It was Allerdyce himself, obviously pretty scared. He said he'd been grabbed by a group called the Alliance for Liberty and Peace. ALP, for short."

"ALP," mused Mr. Strang. "That's a new one on me."

"A bunch of cuckoo terrorists," said Marcos. "They want peace like a drowning man wants a lead weight. And liberty to them means no laws or rules of any kind. No police, no firemen, no schools, no government at all. Just everybody doing their own thing, and if someone gets hurt in the process, well, that's just too bad."

"I see. But what about the phone call to the governor?"

"ALP wants two million bucks—half of the poverty grant—to re-

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lease Allerdyce. Naturally, Governor Hindeman's not going to pay. It would be political suicide for him to give in to their demands. On the other hand, he's going all out to see if Allerdyce can be rescued."

"So the F.B.I., as well as the state and local police, have been alerted," added the teacher. "But so far word has been kept from the public, eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"The clue," said Mr. Strang. "What about the clue?"

Marcos opened his briefcase and took out a single sheet of paper. "This is a copy of what the police found on the floor of Allerdyce's room after he'd been kidnaped," he said. "It's in his own handwriting, and either the ALP members overlooked it or they didn't think it was important. But we think—we hope—that during those hours Allerdyce was held incommunicado in his room, he heard his captors say where he'd be taken. And he used this way to tip us off. Here, have a look at it."

The copy was of a piece of paper wrinkled and streaked with dirt. On one side were several penciled lines of writing. Mr. Strang squinted through his glasses as he read:

1. Midday (4)
2. A Japanese car—a plaything, perhaps? (7)
3. Belief, doctrine, or principle (5)

And scrawled across the bottom of the page was what appeared to be a signature. The name was *Vic Pate*.

"Vic is short for Victor," said Marcos. "And pate means head. Maybe, just maybe, Allerdyce was trying to tell us that if we used our heads, we'd come out of this as winners." He shrugged. "On the other hand, maybe he was just doodling around with a pencil and paper, and the thing isn't a message at all."

"Uh huh," replied Mr. Strang absently. He took a notebook from his pocket and began printing in it with his blue pencil.

"It's a message, all right," he said finally. "No question about it. Allerdyce put it in this form to make his kidnapers think he was just scribbling words to kill time."

"You sound pretty sure of yourself," said Marcos.

"It's strange what you remember about students," Mr. Strang replied. "Eugene Allerdyce was only average in science. But, oh, how he loved the English language. Words were playthings to him. Many times he'd try out word games and puzzles on me so I'd get off the subject of the lesson. Frankly, I allowed him to succeed far too often."

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"But what's that got to do with—"

"Anagrams," Mr. Strang went on, oblivious of the interruption. "You shift letters in a word or name to construct new words. Eugene once rearranged the letters in my name—Leonard Strang—to come up with 'Grand Lone Star.' I never asked whether he thought movies should be made of my lessons or I should move to Texas."

"I still don't see why you're so positive this is a message and not just another game."

"The name Vic Pate," said the teacher, "is an anagram for the word 'captive.' Coincidence? Doubtful. Eugene was tipping you off as to his condition. By inference, the rest of the message must be some clue to his whereabouts."

"Y'know," said Roberts, peering at the paper over Mr. Strang's shoulder, "those things look like crossword-puzzle definitions."

"We've already considered that," said Marcos. "And the number after each one gives the number of letters in the word. So 'midday' is 'noon'—four letters. And 'belief, doctrine, or principle' is 'tenet.' But that second one has got us going around in circles."

"Oh?" Mr. Strang's eyebrows arched. "How many kinds of Japanese cars can there be?"

"Not many," answered Marcos. "In fact, 'Toyota' would fit perfectly, since a toy is a plaything. Except—"

"Except 'Toyota' has only six letters," said Mr. Strang.

"Yes," replied Marcos with a shake of his head. "So maybe Allerdyce made a mistake. Even if it did fit, what have we got?—'noon,' 'Toyota,' and 'tenet.' Where do they get us?"

"Not very far," the teacher agreed. "But, Mr. Marcos, aren't you holding back on me?"

"What do you mean? Holding what back?"

"The city of Ravensport must have thousands of buildings where Eugene Allerdyce might be concealed. And if ALP took him out of the city, the possibilities would be endless. It would be impossible for Eugene to indicate a particular hiding place under those circumstances. No, the location of Eugene's prison has to be limited to a fixed number of places. And I suspect he'd be fairly sure the police knew about them. Mr. Marcos, does ALP have any hideouts that you're familiar with?"

Marcos frowned at Roberts. "Well, you told me he was sharp," the agent growled.

He reached into his briefcase again. "If what I'm about to show you gets out, the bureau will have my head on a plate. Understood?"

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"Understood, Mr. Marcos," said the teacher solemnly.

Marcos passed him a second sheet of paper. On it were five names and addresses:

Ralph Depta—35 Rachel Boulevard
Mrs. Minnie Feingold—81-45 Main Street
J. F. Greer—2591 So. Bayliss Parkway (Apt. 4-B)
Otto Kapak—904 Cade Lane
Franz Menisch—786 Singer Street

"These are places in Ravensport that are ALP hideouts," Marcos told the teacher. "We got the list from an informant, and ALP doesn't know we have it. But it's available to the governor, and it's possible Allerdyce has seen it."

"So it's highly probable that Eugene is at one of those locations?" Mr. Strang asked.

"We're pretty sure of it. Why would ALP risk leaving the city with so many hideouts available?"

"Then couldn't a series of raids be organized? If all those houses were seized at once—"

Marcos shook his head. "Impossible. In the first place, we simply can't gather enough trained men to raid all five places and still insure Allerdyce's safety. And even more important, ALP would just love to have us come down on those other four seemingly innocent homes with guns and tear gas. The propaganda value to them would be worth more than Allerdyce's ransom."

"I see," said the teacher with a frown. "Only when you know exactly where Eugene is located can any rescue be attempted."

"That's about it," replied Marcos. "And you can bet the message Allerdyce left isn't some kind of crossword puzzle, even if it looks like one. We ran 'noon' and 'tenet' and the name of every kind of car you ever heard of through a computer. Nothing."

"Perhaps Eugene used spoonerisms."

"Spoon . . . who?" asked Roberts.

"Spoonerism—the transposing of sounds between words. As 'blushing crow' for 'crushing blow.' Or 'The navy gave the king a twenty-one sun galoot.' They're named for the late Dean Spooner of New College, Oxford, who, legend has it, used to make such verbal errors quite regularly."

"I'm just a detective," said Roberts, "not a college professor."

"Ellery Queen used spoonerisms in one of his detective stories," Mr. Strang responded. "*My Queer Dean*, it's called. I'll find you a copy if you like."

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"Spoonerism, huh?" muttered Marcos. "So Vic Pate would become Pic Vate. And 'noon'? It isn't working, Mr. Strang. Got any other ideas?"

"Let me see. Eugene was addicted to puns. 'Show me a country where the people all ride in shrimp-colored automobiles, and I'll show you a pink-car-nation.' That kind of thing. But it doesn't seem to apply here, does it?"

Roberts and Marcos shook their heads.

"Well, there are punctuation tricks," said the teacher.

"Come again, Mr. Strang?"

Mr. Strang printed a few words on a page of his notebook. He showed them to Roberts.

City Property
No Parking
Permitted

"What does that mean to you, Paul?"

"It means if you leave your car there, somebody's going to hang a ticket on it."

Mr. Strang used his pencil to jot a few additional marks on the page. Then he returned the notebook to Roberts.

"And now?" the teacher asked.

Roberts smiled as he read the slightly changed notice.

City Property?
No. Parking
Permitted.

"Mr. Strang," said Marcos, "Allerdyce's definitions have three parentheses, one question mark, one dash, and three commas. Now we can juggle those around all we want, but we still come up empty. How many of these word gimmicks are there, anyway?"

"Dozens, I'm afraid. There's alliteration and synecdoche and hyperbole and onomatopoeia and—"

"What you're saying is, we could be here for a week messing around with the words in those definitions. And we just haven't got that long."

"How long do—" Mr. Strang began.

"We have to print the governor's answer to ALP's demands in the newspaper the day after tomorrow," Roberts told him.

"Look, Mr. Strang." Marcos put the papers back into his briefcase and closed it. "We've got another call to make this evening. Our men are checking everybody who ever knew Allerdyce, just hoping somebody will come up with something useful. Now you've been

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very cooperative with this business about Allerdyce's word puzzles, but it's just not working out. Thanks for your time, Mr. Strang."

When Roberts and Marcos left, the science teacher was in no mood to continue marking papers. He got very little sleep that night. The following morning his car refused to start, and he had to walk all the way to Aldershot High School. By the beginning of the first period, when it was time to meet the eleventh-grade physics class, the crusty old teacher was in an absolutely vile frame of mind.

The science room was set up for an experiment. A heavy metal ball about four inches in diameter hung in the air a foot above the top of Mr. Strang's desk. It was suspended from a twelve-foot length of cord. The other end of the cord was tied to a small ring mounted in the room's high ceiling.

"Today," the teacher snapped peevishly, "we are going to consider the pendulum. It was Galileo who was credited with the discovery that a pendulum of a given length will oscillate in a given period of time, regardless of the arc of its swing. We are now going to put that theory to the test. Observe carefully what you see, and record everything in your notebooks. Donald Frazer, you'll assist so you can be closest to the experiment and will miss nothing. You need an A desperately this marking period."

There were a few titters throughout the room. Then a plump boy in the front row got up. "Yes, Mr. Strang," he said.

"Take the ball to the side wall there. Stand on a chair, if you have to."

Donald grasped the metal ball and swung it until it was almost touching the wall.

"Good. Now I'm going to start the metronome here. Donald, you will release the ball at the first tick. Ready?"

Donald nodded.

Tick went the metronome.

Donald opened his hand. The ball swept across the width of the room, slowing and finally stopping inches short of a window.

Tick

The ball made its return journey.

Tick

The students were fascinated. As the minutes went by, the arc through which the ball swung became shorter and shorter. But still the pendulum and the metronome kept pace with each other.

Swish

Tick

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Nobody noticed that Mr. Strang seemed to have become hypnotized by the ball as it swung from side to side in front of him. Right to left. Left to right.

Midday—noon—

Tick

Japanese car—Toyota—only six letters—

Tick

Belief, doctrine, or principle—tenet—

Japanese car—no, *A* Japanese car—

Tick

You need an A desperately—

Tick

"That's it!" Mr. Strang's shout reverberated in the hushed silence of the room. "That's what Eugene was trying to tell us!"

"Don't you feel well, Mr. Strang?"

With an effort the teacher averted his eyes from the swinging ball. "You were staring so hard at the pendulum," said the girl on the other side of the demonstration table. "Like the whole class had just disappeared or something. Do you want me to get the nurse?"

"No. No, Cathy, that won't be necessary. Just sit quietly with the others. You'll have to excuse me for a moment, though. I have to make a phone call."

When Mr. Strang dialed the F.B.I. office in Ravensport, he was told that agent Marcos was out and couldn't be reached for the rest of the day. Mr. Strang had a few rather harsh words with the person who'd answered the phone.

Mike Marcos returned the teacher's call in less than five minutes.

And Mr. Strang told him the house where Eugene Allerdyce was being held captive.

Slightly before noon that same day, in the city of Ravensport, a man in the uniform of the U.S. Postal Service knocked at the front door of the little house at 904 Cade Lane.

"What is it?" called a woman's voice from behind the door.

"Registered letter, ma'am. You'll have to sign for it."

At the sound of a key being turned in the locked door the postman adjusted the bag on his shoulder. At this, a gardener working next door reached into the rear of his pickup truck and pulled out the high-powered rifle concealed there. He leaped over the fence and ran toward the adjacent house.

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A similarly equipped rubbish man approached the other side of the house, while two telephone linesmen covered the rear door.

When the front door was opened, the woman who stood there did not get the letter she expected. Instead, she found herself looking down the muzzle of a .38 Police Special revolver.

"Police, ma'am," said the postman sharply. "We have a warrant—"

"Harry! George!" yelled the woman. "It's the fuzz! Go down and—"

Her voice was drowned out by the sound of shattering glass as the other men outside punched through the first-floor windows with the butts of their rifles. "Freeze, you two!" shouted the gardener to the two men who were scuttling toward a doorway near the kitchen. For a moment it seemed as if the two men might make a break for it. But then they saw the guns poking in through the windows and thought better of it.

At the same time the rubbish man broke the glass of a cellar window. He saw another man seated against the far wall.

"Come on over here!" the rubbish man called into the dimly lit basement. "Come on over here and let me take a look at you."

"I—I can't," said the man in a hoarse whisper.

"Why can't you?"

"Because they've got me chained to the wall." And then, realizing he was safe, Eugene Allerdyce broke down.

For the second time in as many days there was a tapping at the door of Mr. Strang's room.

"Come in, Paul," called the teacher.

Paul Roberts stood in the doorway, his bulk almost concealing the light from the hall beyond. "How in blazes did you know it was me, Mr. Strang?" he asked.

"The F.B.I. would have got in touch with you sometime this afternoon about the rescue of Eugene Allerdyce. Your shift ends at four. You went home, had a beer, and ate supper. After supper, maybe another beer. But all the time two things were going through your mind."

"Yes?" said Roberts with a grin. "And what were they?"

"First, you were wondering what there was in Eugene Allerdyce's puzzle that indicated the right house. The F.B.I. didn't tell you, or you wouldn't be here now."

"Yes, okay," said Roberts. "And what was the second thing?"

"You were thinking that you wouldn't give me the satisfaction of

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dropping by and asking for an explanation. Otherwise you'd have been here earlier."

"You're right," said Roberts sheepishly. "All through the early news I kept telling myself there was no way I was going to come over here. But Bobbi kept saying, 'Go on over, darling, and have him fill you in. Otherwise you'll never get any sleep tonight.' So here I am. Okay, now I've eaten crow. Tell me. What was the clue in Allerdyce's puzzle?"

"The answer, Paul, is in two parts. Once I discovered the first, the second was obvious."

"Okay, I'll bite. What was the first thing?"

"That crossword definition—the one about the Japanese car."

"What about it?"

"It read 'A Japanese car—a plaything, perhaps?' Why was the article A included there, but not in definition three? Because the A must be included in the definition. So the clue is not just 'Toyota,' but 'A Toyota.' Seven letters—exactly what's called for."

"I still don't get it," said Roberts.

"What do we have now? 'Noon'—'A Toyota'—and—'tenet.' There you have it!"

"Have what?" asked Roberts.

"They're all palindromes. I didn't realize it until I saw a pendulum swinging in my class this morning. The same movement, left to right, right to left."

"But just what are palo—pal—those things you said?"

"Paul, the answer to the first definition was Noon. N - O - O - N, spelled from left to right, the way in which we read. Now try spelling it from right to left."

"N - O - O - N. Why, it's the same!"

"Exactly. Therefore it's a palindrome. As are 'A Toyota' and 'tenet.' The letters read the same from back to front as they do from front to back."

The teacher took a notebook from the table and leafed through it. "Eugene might have used some longer ones," he said. "Like this one I found in the library: 'Doc, note, I dissent. A fast never prevents a fatness. I diet on cod.' That has 51 letters, yet it's a perfect palindrome. It might even make sense to some people."

"But how could those whatever-you-call-them tell you it was the house on Cade Lane where—"

"Eugene Allerdyce might have hit on one palindrome by accident. But three in a row? Too much of a coincidence. No, he used them

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for a purpose. And when I remembered Kapak's name on that list of ALP hideouts—"

"Otto Kapak! That's right!"

"Both the first and last names are palindromes. To someone as fond of word puzzles as Eugene Allerdyce, the chance to leave a clue of that kind was irresistible. I called Marcos, he accepted my solution, and the rest, as they say, is history."

Roberts sat down on the edge of the bed, shaking his head. "I don't know, Mr. Strang," he said. "This time everything turned out okay. I mean, we got Allerdyce back safely and all. But terrorist groups? Kidnaping of public figures? I can't help wishing I were back in the old days when police work was a lot less complicated. Give me a good old-fashioned bank robbery any day."

"But Paul," said Mr. Strang, rising and placing a hand on the detective's shoulder. "Are we not drawn onward, we few, drawn onward to new era?"

Roberts looked at the teacher oddly. "Who are you trying to be? The Old Philosopher or something?"

"As philosophy, that last question of mine is completely pointless, Paul." Mr. Strang tented his fingertips and stared innocently at the ceiling.

"But as a palindrome? Perfect!"

"Q"

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You say you especially like English mysteries? Good. Here's a new one whose manner of telling is strictly unorthodox. Oh? You say you don't *care for English mysteries? Well, you'll be surprised how lively they can be . . .*

IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

by JEFFRY SCOTT

But darling, don't be a stupe! Of course I'd do it differently if I had to do it again.

Not that I *will* have to. My precious, beloved husband Oliver is doornail-dead—loathsome old toad. Granted, he was the world's prize bore, but even his staying power couldn't triumph over a jolly good whack on the head.

Sweetest, stop *gobbling* at me like that. Certainly I did it. Don't you read newspapers? What d'you think this place is, a health farm? Really! Ollie always reckoned I was a featherbrain, but some people—

Talking of health farms, Ollie might still be alive if he hadn't waddled off to one of those places every few months. *Too* ironic—dedicated to living longer, and it was the death of him! Actually I was, if you want to niggle over details, but in principle he killed himself.

No, darling, *I* was the suicidal one. From quite early in our marriage. Day One of the honeymoon, I seem to recall.

That's another irony. I was determined to escape all the dire Drearies I grew up among—Ma Dreary, Pa Dreary, and their dreary jobs and dreary house in a dreary town—so I positively *leaped* at the first personable stranger.

And Oliver, wouldn't you know, turned out to be the Arch-Dreary of All Drearies. Their respected founder in person, sweetie.

Did I say personable? Ollie was never that. The Poached Egg, I called him, when we met. You know, clean and wholesome, but

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terribly bland and a bit *wobbly*, somehow. A Greek god he wasn't. Almost as good though—he was obscenely rich.

Very soon I discovered *why* he was well off. The original High-pockets, darl'. Arm trouble—too short to reach his billfold. But I did my little best. I considered it simple justice—for somebody like me to endure all that droning and Poached Eggery, day in, day out, called for compensation.

Didn't he carry on about it, mind! Our first row—sorry, our first *big* row—was about extravagance, and the record never changed. "I give you an allowance," Ollie always raved. But in an unexciting, droning brand of raving. "You've got your allowance!"

"Is that what it is?" I'd say. "I thought it was a practical illustration of the Poverty Line."

"Whole families could exist handsomely, lavishly, d'you hear, on what you fritter away in a month."

"Possibly, Angel, but only if they lived in dreary 1066 or something." On we'd go, all merry and bright. Oh, Laughsville lived while Ollie was around.

Then there were his friends. Like calls to like, and I didn't like them a bit. Business friends you can't choose, but Ollie's own family and cronies . . . Dire, darling! Tweedy, fubsy, into dazzling stuff like church-brass rubbings and the ship tax in the Fifteenth Century. I wish I could *convey* the direness of their dreariness. Well, those who didn't look like wet sheepdogs very often smelled like them; their husbands were even worse.

Enter Michel. Oh, I'm sure he was Mike from Clapham, but who's asking? My hair artiste. Madly decorative in that vulgar curly-hairy style. Decorative, with practical uses, one might say.

Michel from Clapham-sur-Railway and I got up to terrible misconduct whenever Ollie trundled off to the fat farm. But I *did* miss him. Don't be such a dunce, sweetie-pie, not *Ollie*, Michel. I missed him when Ollie *wasn't* at the fat farm.

Also, there was the little problem of Sue. She owned the salon, quite pretty if you like a *painstakingly* blonde girl with buck teeth. Young, where I'm forty-mumble, and she wanted to marry Michel.

"You're a wicked old boiler, but I'd marry you if you were free," silver-tongued Michel confided to me one evening. "I mean, you've got more money. But Sue's is available, and that old man of yours, he could outlive the pair of us." Such a romantic!

Anyway, we'll do a speed-up to last Christmas. I was just sitting in the bedroom a few days before Christmas Eve, thinking what I'd

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like to give *myself*. And I got this *vivid* vision of a funeral, with me weeping over the coffin, *most* fetching in basic black. It was winter, leaves swirling around the churchyard, only the leaves were *£20 notes*. Delicious.

And then I thought: Why not?

Then I thought: Because they'll catch you, silly.

Then I thought: Well, make sure they don't!

I went to bed on the spot, with a special face pack, because my brain was definitely *whammied* by all that high-octane pondering. The poor thing hardly knew what had hit it.

But funnily enough, the plan popped into my head next morning, ready made. All the bits were there and had been for years, I suppose. They only needed shaking into place.

It was, as far as possible in the Kingdom of the Drearies, a fabulous Christmas. I felt really nostalgic about Ollie, now that he was going. I was even ready to tolerate his hundreds of direly dreary relatives—my dear, he had cousin Drearies and nephew Drearies, not counting the twice-removeds and whatever.

Did I mention that one of Ollie's pet drones was concerned with my being unobservant? *Naturally*, being Ollie, he put it this way: "Well, I *say* unobservant, but what I mean is you're blind as a bat and far too vain to wear glasses."

Nerve!

If you want to know, what happened was that *after* finding that I couldn't tolerate contact lenses, my sight just naturally improved, *miraculously* in my humble opinion, and I didn't need dreary specs. All the clan Dreary McOllie wore them, needless to say.

The Drearies made a big production out of giving presents—parcels under the tree, glasses of sherry at eleven a.m. Christmas Day, then open the tatty things.

I got a mingy little mink wrap, but the way the rest of them went "Ooh" and "Ah" and "Recklessly generous, Ollie," and similar rubbish, you'd think I'd been licensed to pillage the Galactic Fur Company, Limited, for life.

There were other gifts, of course. Including a silver No-Nib pen, one of those new ballpoints they'd been advertising on TV as the world's costliest. Which was a black lie. What it should have been, was the world's costliest if you're dead cheap and think buying a bit of junk at more than its proper market value is a big deal. *Right* up Ollie's alley, natch.

I noticed a hush fall on the halls of merriment when I opened that

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one. You can always tell when everybody else is in on a joke. The Drearies were very keen on that, usually at my expense.

"Unobservant, unobservant," Ollie chanted, and assorted Drearies were sniffling and neighing and shuffling their hoofs on the parquet. I gave the wretched pen a closer look, wondering if it would give me an electric shock or something, but it was just a little No-Nib. So I just put it aside and let them enjoy their heehawing and whinnying as they stamped in their stalls. Too *bovine*, the pack of them!

Luckily the Christmas tree caught fire at that moment. Such a laugh! Ollie was almost in tears, totting up how much the redecorating might cost. The supporting-cast Drearies dashed about and trod on each other and slung water in saucepans and did twice the damage. I very nearly let Ollie survive until *next* Christmas, because I was enjoying the idea of him having to lash out for another rug and new wallpaper and repairs to the ceiling.

But a girl can't be all heart. I thought about twelve more droning months, and canceled the reprieve.

A week later Ollie took himself off to Thameswell Grange, the health farm. The fire had shaken him up. He'd hardly spoken since the conflagration—refreshing novelty, but too good to last. "Maybe I won't bother to redecorate," were his parting words. "Mother's got that great place near Reading—for two pins I'd sell this barracks and we could save a mint by living with Mother."

I might mention that "this barracks" was only a titchy three-bedroom house at St. George's Hill, Weybridge, Surrey—not an *inch* too big for two people, if one of them happened to be Ollie. As for "Mother's great place," it was a bungalow.

Seeing my expression, Ollie blurted out, "Don't you dare look at me that way, you, you—I'll sell this house if it's the last thing I do!"

So be it, I thought. So *be* it! Death to all Drearies, when they get tyrannical! Honestly, you must agree, he brought it on himself.

That very night I went to the elder of the McDreary clan, Uncle George. Colonel Uncle George (Retd.) actually.

Talk about *me* being vain! Colonel Uncle George was as near senile as makes no odds, but he'd never admit it. And I'd noticed—I *mean*, it was hard to *overlook*—that he slept a lot.

He'd be droning away, sounding exactly like Ollie heard on a bad telephone connection from Australia, and then he would get cut off. Ten minutes later: "Huh? Hah! Wasn't asleep, wasn't asleep!" And he'd take up in mid-drone, right where he had left off.

Colonel Uncle George's housekeeper was away, Christmas-visit-

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ing relatives at Wigan or Shoeburyness or somewhere equally jaw-crackingly boring—even the Drearies' hired help were dreary, I tell you, darling, it was a *plague*. The point being that I had an excuse to visit C.U.G.

Cuggy was pleased to see me, not that he *could*, properly, dreary old beast. I made him a snack on toast and a cup of coffee, adding one of my sleeping tablets and *stirring well*, as we Cordon Bleu ladies say.

"Tell me about Dunkirk, Colonel Uncle George," I yelled (he was deaf, too) and off he droned: Nazi armored might . . . little ships . . . Churchill . . . drone-drone-drone—silence. Invading Dreamland, bless him!

Off *I* went, having sneaked out the back way. I took Colonel Uncle George's Mini, and less than an hour later was at Thameswell Grange, the fat farm. It's a converted motel, guests living in chalet affairs.

Leaving the car half a mile away, I waited until my eyes adjusted to the darkness, and positively *crept* to Ollie's chalet. He always had the same one, 23A, that's how dreary he was.

Business at Thameswell Grange wasn't *thriving*, because you could tell that few of the chalets were occupied. Better and better. I tapped at Ollie's door.

"What the hell are you doing here? What's the matter?"

Even for the chief of the clan McDreary, that struck me as a *teeny* bit—well, mediocre for a deathbed speech. But getting him in the right frame of mind for anything more spectacular would ruin the whole thing. Also, he was standing up at the time; deathbed didn't come into it.

"Well?" he snorted.

I hate being hustled, it flusters me. And I'd gone to a lot of trouble, fixing up Colonel Uncle George and driving all that way on my own when I haven't even got a proper driver's license. Ollie never *did* appreciate other people's efforts.

"On your head be it," I told him with quiet dignity. And it was. Bop! A great big spanner thing from the tool kit of the Mini. Later they told me it was the jack, but I'm sure that was the police being cunning and trying to confuse the innocent—well, innocent at *heart*—because Ollie was the only one involved; nobody called Jack came into it.

Stepping over Ollie, I washed the great big spanner thing in his bathroom. Then I walked back to the car, put the Blunt Object (there

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were sharpish bits, too, but by and large it was a B.O.) back with the other tools, and returned to Colonel Uncle George.

I had been away for two hours; ten o'clock chimed from the grandfather clock in the hall as I slid into my chair. "Eh? What? Wasn't asleep, wasn't asleep . . . Stuka divebombers . . . perky Cockney soldier-wallahs . . . drone-drone-drone." Perfect, sweetie—the perfect crime!

The first of the phone calls came an hour later, just as I was wondering *how* I could spin things out much longer. I'd left instructions with the exchange to relay calls from our house to Colonel Uncle George's. I wanted myself *firmly* fixed in his company, all evening.

The call was from the Thameswell police. A man tentatively identified as Mr. Oliver had been found murdered, blah-blah-blah. The world really *is* full of droners. They're especially tiresome when being tactful and breaking the news gently.

I had to go and identify the corpse. The local police called at Colonel Uncle George's and drove me down. I noticed they didn't take my short cut to Thameswell, but I didn't utter a *cheep* about it. I'm not, darling, a complete idiot!

Inspector Dreary—I forget his name, but he's balding and drones a lot—met me at Thameswell and took me to the mortuary. "An ordeal, I'm afraid," he said, "but the gentleman looks all right. As if resting."

They pulled the drawer out—honestly it was like a *giant* filing cabinet, I was surprised Ollie wasn't under D, or possibly B for Boring.

And he did look as if resting. Like he always did, a stuffed codfish, but I could hardly share *that* thought. "It's him," I told Inspector Dreary.

Then we talked for a bit. Inspector Dreary arranged to see me at eleven o'clock the following morning, and I was driven home.

So far, so super. But up in the bedroom, emptying my handbag—I *always* empty it last thing at night—disaster!

Oh, I forgot to tell you about dropping my handbag. When I bopped Ollie, the bag was over my arm, and the strap broke. It *would* spill open on the doorstep, *too* irritating! But I'd collected everything before leaving.

Only I *hadn't*. Ollie might have droned on about me being unobservant, but I've got a good memory. I *know* what's in my purse,

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thank you, at any given time of the day. After all, I've put it there, yes?

So . . . that bloody silver ballpen was missing. Fair play for it, the thing wrote smoothly, and I'd taken to carrying it with me. Now it wasn't *there*.

If darling Michel hadn't been messing about with it that morning, my hair would have *stood on end*, sweetie! Some women wouldn't have the brains to work things out, but *I* realized that if the pen wasn't *here*, it was very likely *there*. On Ollie's doorstep at Thameswell.

I didn't panic. Darling, one owes it to oneself. I ruined my nail gloss, *gnawing*, but I *never* panicked. And when I thought it over, it was *childishly* simple. Those No-Nib pens had been advertised on TV for *weeks* before Christmas. They'd probably sold *millions* of them.

It was too small, I hoped, to take fingerprints.

And Inspector Dreary wasn't arriving until quite late the next morning. Super. Superette, anyway. I had time to sneak out and buy another No-Nib.

I was out and about by eight in the morning. I caught the bus at the bottom of the road, went into Weybridge, and prowled through a *huge* stationery store. I bought a lot of papers and stuff and—here's the brilliant part—I *stole* a No-Nib pen! Being expensive—by Ollie's standards, mark you, *not* mine—they were kept behind a counter; but I sent the girl off to match some notepaper, leaned over, and—*presto*.

When I got home it was still only ten o'clock, and Inspector Dreary was waiting by the front door. "Shopping, I see," he said.

"Life goes on," I sighed.

"Doesn't it just," he said, in his dreary, sarcastic voice.

Leading him in, thanking my stars I'd put the pen in my purse and thrown its box away, I left my shopping hold-all on the hallstand. "You're early," I commented. *Cool*, darling, as the proverbial whatever it is!

"And your husband is late," Inspector Dreary replied. Heavily. "The late Mr. Oliver. But you seem to be taking it well, ma'am. For the widow of a murder victim."

Cheek!

"One does, doesn't one?" I said, not coolly but *coldly*.

"Humph. I've been talking to Mr. Oliver's family, your in-laws. They all mention him giving you a No-Nib pen at Christmas."

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Golly, I thought, they don't miss much, these detectives. I'd *rather* hoped they wouldn't *find* the pen, you see. I mean, *I* never find pens lying around, do you? It seems against nature, somehow.

"You've still got it, no doubt," Inspector Dreary followed up, playing his ace.

I couldn't resist giving him a *tiny* thrill. "Now *where* can it be?" Showing him my left profile, the best. "Ooh, *here* it is, hiding away in my handbag!" A rotten loser, he just grunted, hardly looked at the thing, and put it into an envelope.

"Watch this," he said to his sergeant. "I'm writing, 'Pen B, handed to me by Mrs. Oliver and claimed as the one presented to her by her husband at Christmas.' I'm now signing, dating, and sealing the receptacle."

Receptacle, darling! If one hadn't pegged him as a Dreary by then, he'd given himself away.

"Now, ma'am, have you ever visited the Thameswell Grange health farm, where your husband was a regular client, and where he was battered to death?"

I truly cringed at that. My little bop inflated into—well, it hardly bore thinking about. "Certainly not," I said crossly. "I've never been there. I'm not even sure where it is."

Inspector Dreary and his minion—possibly a myrmidon, I've never been *too* sure of the difference—exchanged those heh-heh-heh sort of glances. "Think very carefully, Mrs. Oliver—" He went into a *long* song-and-dance about being aware of my rights and Did I Require the Services of a Lawyer, drone-drone-drone.

"Certainly not," I said.

"Very well," he muttered, but I *suspected* it wasn't, for me anyway. He handed me something. Another No-Nib pen, *huge* surprise, ha-ha.

"This was found in the long grass beside the doorstep of the victim's chalet," Inspector Dreary lectured. "It is the pen your husband gave you."

"Rubbish. *Double* rubbish. I've just shown you that pen. It never leaves my side." Which was pitching it a bit strong, but it seemed a time for heroic measures.

Inspector Dreary was grinning, the heartless brute. "I gather you need spectacles, Mrs. Oliver."

"That's totally insulting and I shall complain to the Chief Constable. People often make that mistake because my eyes are so large and blue and *soulful*."

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"Swimmy," the sergeant-minion-myrmidon put it, making me jump. "My Gran's just the same, when she loses her specs."

That *did* get me on the raw. "Police brutality, this is *torture*. How *dare* you!"

"Steady on," said Inspector Dreary. "No need for us to fall out. Take this magnifying glass, ma'am, and kindly examine the pen found near your husband's body last night."

He really *did* have a magnifying glass—men are such children, just because Sherlock Holmes always carried one. "You forgot your funny hat with the flaps, the deerhunter," I said. *Very* much on my high horse. Cuttingly, darling.

"It's deerstalker, ma'am, and I haven't the head for it. Comes down over my eyes. Just look at this pen, please."

He sounded *very* much like Ollie—dogged, downbeat, plod on. I believe in reincarnation, darling—but surely not so *soon?*

It was a super magnifying glass. The pen seemed the size of a rolling pin.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," said Inspector Dreary. Ah, I thought, at last the compliments. But he ruined it, the pompous fool. "For you, Mrs. Oliver, guilt is in your eye . . . in what you failed to see."

With my nose to the glass, I groaned and said a *terribly* naughty word. Ollie had been dreary to the end—making sure of the last word, long before I polished him off.

My dear! There on the pen, in teensy-*tiny* engraving. *To my dear wife, Christmas 1980. Ollie.*

"Q"

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a *NEW* crime story by

HENRY T. PARRY

Some entries in the secret diary kept by a young woman living in Massachusetts during the Civil War. . .

PARIS GREEN

by HENRY T. PARRY

Feb. 16. They are sitting alone in there again. By the fire. The fire I laid. If only Papa would speak to Kate. I know that if poor dear Mamma were alive—just think, it is only two years ago that she passed to a better world—I'm sure she would not permit it. And with the door closed. To cut down the draught, Kate says. What would the neighbours say if they knew. That venomous Miss Lavinia Lowe, for example. Not that Kate, with her head always in the clouds, would ever be aware of the gossip.

I can imagine—no, I know; never mind how—what they are talking about. Poetry. Kate's poetry. Imagine a captain in the Twentieth Mass. talking about poetry. No wonder the Rebels are chasing us all over Virginia. But Kate says he has every right to be home because he is recovering from a wound. Maybe so.

Now I can hear them laughing. I know who they are laughing at.

I do not know how long I can permit this to go on.

Feb. 25. Captain Wilkie escorted Kate to meeting yesterday. I must say she looked unusually attractive with her big brown eyes and shining brown hair. The brown smudges she so often has under her eyes were barely visible and the fur piece she wore—poor dear Mamma's, although I am imperfect enough to wish Mamma had left it to me—hid the mole she has just below her chin. I remember how Reverend Fisk used to comment on our differences, I being short

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and sturdy, and Kate tall and inclined to be thin. "Persis," he said, "you and your sister could pose as personifications of Storm and Sunshine, or maybe La Penserosa and L'Allegra, you with your black hair and eyes and dark brows, and Kate, well, Kate—" He smiled, fatuously, I thought, and didn't finish. He should know that Kate can be as gloomy as anyone else at times, just like one of our March Sundays.

I admire Reverend Fisk very much. They are saying he will never recover from the loss of his dear wife, Martha, last spring. But I never saw a man in the prime of life who didn't remarry, especially if he has four children, all under the age of fourteen. I did think that he held Kate's hand a little too long yesterday morning as we were coming out of church, and that his comment to her seemed quite inappropriate, coming as it did so soon after service. I would have thought Papa would have noticed it, but these days he doesn't seem to be interested in anything outside of his law books.

Met Walter Sweet from the seed store on the church steps. He says his spring shipment of Paris green has come in and did I want him to send my order out by the boy. Kate may write poems about the garden, but I am the one who poisons the bugs so we'll have potatoes in the fall.

Whatever Kate may think of her gentlemen admirers, there is no evidence of it in her poems which are all about nature and gardens and snow, of which there is plenty today. Lonny Hicks, the hired man, couldn't come by, so I had to shovel a path to the barn to feed Doll and to bring in the wood. There is something satisfying about shovelling a path in deep snow, in piling up a shining white wall on each side of you, shutting out the world, and at the same time making steady progress—earned progress, I like to think—towards some goal, even such a humble one as feeding the family horse.

I have found where Kate keeps the poems she has written. In Grandmother Stevens' old sewing-basket on the attic stairs. There are hundreds of them. Kate is always mailing some of them off, generally to *The Boston Review*, but they never get published. She is waiting to hear from the last batch she mailed.

Captain Wilkie is coming this afternoon to take Kate for a sleigh ride. She will write a poem about it, I suppose. I do hope she is not making herself too—how shall I say it?—available.

March 2. Met Reverend Fisk on my way to Snell's Dry Goods Store. He looked quite handsome, the way the cold gives him some color.

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He is usually so pale, from writing and studying all the time, I suppose.

He once again expressed his thanks for all I had done during poor Mrs. Fisk's last illness. He said he owed Dr. Porter and me a debt he could never repay. I inquired after his sister, Mary Anne Fisk, who did the day nursing. She is well and after visiting here for a few weeks is thinking of going to Washington to volunteer as a nurse for the Sanitary Commission.

March 10. Miss Lavinia Lowe stopped in this afternoon to bring the receipt for walnut cake she promised. We had a cup of tea and she told me a scandalous story, making me promise, of course, never to breathe a word of it. She said she heard it from her brother, Ben, who works on *The Enterprise.* Seems the newspaper received a letter saying that Captain Wilkie was not home recovering from a wound at all. That he was absent without leave. The paper couldn't print it, of course, because the letter wasn't signed. But it shows you how diseased the minds of some people can be. Wild horses would not drag that story out of me.

It snowed quite heavily again two days ago, making Papa say that this weather was ridiculous, even for Massachusetts. When I go out, I stand for a few minutes on the back porch, putting on my gloves, and look out at the beauty and the silence that have descended on the world. When I shovelled the path out to the barn—no Lonny Hicks, of course—I was able to pile the snow on each side higher than my head, so that I stood closed in by whiteness, alone with purity, with the blue sky the only thing to be seen, shining with emptiness.

March 19. Kate is standing on tip-toe with happiness. Captain Wilkie received some kind of notice saying that because of his wound he was relieved from further military service. When he got the papers at the post-office, he walked straight out here and asked Kate to marry him. They will make such an attractive couple. They won't be rich, but what does that matter? He will undoubtedly go back to his teaching at the academy although I should not be surprised if Papa invited him to read law at his office.

We must now begin planning for the wedding, which Kate says will be in June. I must especially think about how I am going to feed the wedding guests. Papa looked happy for the first time since

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Mamma left us. I am happy for my sister. I am very happy for my sister.

May 25. Too busy for entries. But the most glorious event has occurred. Last week Kate received a letter from Willnor and Shields, the publishing company in Boston to which she had sent her poems last winter. They have decided to publish her poems. Kate is beside herself with joy, coming as it does three weeks before her wedding. Grandmother Stevens' sewing-basket is filling with the poems Kate continues to write. Mostly about the garden and flowers, nothing about love. I should have thought she would write about that, now of all times. If you have everything, why not write about it? Or maybe if you have everything, there is no reason to write.

June 18. Three days ago, on the day she was to be married, Kate was laid to rest. Poor Papa is heart-broken and scarcely leaves his study. I try to find relief in the housework and in working in the garden, the garden poor dear Kate loved to write about. Whatever sickness it was that took away poor Martha Fisk and left Reverend Fisk a widower seems to have stricken poor Kate. Nausea, thirst, a gradual slowing of the pulse, and other unpleasant symptoms which it is not seemly to describe.

I sat at her bedside all night every night, with Mary Anne Fisk relieving me during the day; but nothing kind, patient Dr. Porter or Mary Anne or I could do made any difference. Dr. Porter says that we do not know about these things. I am resigned; it was to be.

Lavinia Lowe came by this morning and told me that Dr. Porter took the car to Boston yesterday. (Is he suspicious? Is he going to consult a chemist or a toxicologist?) She said Captain Wilkie was trying to get back into some kind of war work and was thinking of going to Washington to work for the Sanitary Commission, as Mary Anne Fisk is planning to do. She also said—and she seemed to be so eager to say this that she leaned over and spilled tea on that ancient black bombazine dress she wears eternally—that Reverend Fisk has been seeing a lady in Sconset. There is something unhealthy in the way Vinny Lowe hoards scraps of information about other people's lives.

June 30. A letter arrived from Willnor and Shields who are to publish Kate's poems. It is from an editor there who asks if Kate has additional poems to submit. He asked for fifteen, or even ten, more

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poems, to make the planned volume of a generally acceptable size. He seemed to think that every poet had a stock of poems on hand. I replied immediately, telling him of poor Kate's tragic death and saying that there were no additional poems that could be found. In view of this, and in accordance with the family's wishes, I asked that he return her poems unpublished.

I have taken out the manuscripts that Kate kept in Grandmother Stevens' sewing-basket. The sheets of paper Kate used fitted exactly, I found. I was able to line the shelves of the pantry cupboards with them, turning the sheets face down so that the writing on them would not show. In these sad and dreadful times, it is necessary to be saving.

July 3. As I stood on the back porch this morning, I could see into the window of Papa's study and saw that he had visitors—Dr. Porter and Reverend Fisk and Walter Sweet, the man from the seed store. Whatever it was they were saying, it disturbed Papa greatly—I could see him holding his handkerchief to his eyes, his head bowed. Oh, I wish it would snow again, a heavy snow, so that I could tunnel into it, into its coldness and purity, which are like the coldness and purity of death.

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a Western detective story by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Another relatively unknown story by the creator of Perry Mason . . . Erle Stanley Gardner was a lawyer, so he knew how to write authoritatively about the law. He also knew how to write authentically about the desert—he lived on the desert and he loved it. This story happened up near the Armagosa Sink, east of Death Valley, not far from the Funeral Mountains, and it will remind you, in its own way, of a yarn spun by Jack London. . .

THE VALLEY OF LITTLE FEARS

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

This thing is true of the desert: the first time you feel its spell you'll either love it or you'll hate it. If you hate it, your hatred will be founded on fear.

Those who know the desert claim you never change that original reaction, no matter how long you live in the sandy wastes. In that they're wrong. I know of one case where the rule didn't work. The desert is hard to figure, and you can't make rules about it.

I know the story of the man who wore a dog collar around his neck and who lived in the valley of little fears. And the story is known to but few people.

Not that they didn't know of the dog collar. He wore his shirt buttoned at the neck, trying to hide what was underneath. But he forgot himself once or twice and men got a glimpse of the leather collar, studded with little rivets of polished metal, with the silver nameplate on the back.

After that the news traveled as it does in the desert, little whispers seeping from place to place with incredible speed. The desert's like

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that, a place of whispers. The sand drifts along on the dry desert winds and rustles against the stalks of the cactus. It sounds as though someone was whispering. Then, when the wind gets stronger, the sand rustles across the sand with the strangest whisper of all: sand talking to sand.

I've lain in my blankets many a night and listened to the sand whispers. Sometimes you think you can catch a word here and there. Perhaps, just before you're dropping off to sleep, you'll hear a whole sentence. It'll pop into your mind just as if someone breathed it in your ear. But no one's there. It's just the sand whispering to the sand.

It happened up near the Armagosa Sink, which is over east of Death Valley. Between the Funeral Mountains and the Kingston Range, nature went crazy. The Armagosa Creek is a freak in itself. And there's miles of cinders, and a place they call Ash Meadows because it's a great stretch of volcanic ash. Then there are weird mountains colored with reds and browns and mineral greens. There's no vegetation to speak of.

Most of the springs are poisonous. The country is filled with all sorts of metal. There are a few mines that employ help, a few individual prospects that keep some old desert rats busy. And these men have their little gathering places. They have a saloon that is a saloon, not an imitation. They have a dance hall where women come, stay for a while, and then go. Even the dance-hall girls can't stand the country very long.

And over all is silence and sunlight.

Human nature gets worn to the raw, and civilization is forgotten. The barren hills twist weird forms of volcanic spires into the hot sky. The little desert winds, hissing down the slopes of the mountains, bite deep into the sand and send it whispering and scampering over the plain. The desert rules.

It was into this place that Fred Smith came.

He gave his name as Fred Smith, and his eyes remained downcast as he spoke the words. We knew that this was not his name, knew also that he was alien to the game of inventing false names.

In his eyes there was a great fear, a nameless dread that cropped out once in a while and was then stifled back into the dark depths of his soul. He feared the desert, and he feared something that he had left behind. It was stark fear that had driven him into the waste spaces, and it was fear that held him here.

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They gave him a job at the Red Bonanza Mine. It was a job on the surface. Such men don't do good work in the dark solitude of an underground drift.

One morning Nick Cryder rambled up to the mine to look him over. Nick was the deputy sheriff who had charge of the district and he was plenty hard-boiled, as a man had to be with his job. I happened to be present when Nick dropped in.

"Newcomer, eh?" said Cryder.

Smith was making some entries in the time book. His hand started to shake so much that the pen wobbled off the line.

"Yes, sir," he answered, his eyes fastened on the silver star that Nick had pinned to his vest.

"Where you from?"

"Los Angeles."

"What'd you leave there for?"

"Just to get away from—lots of things—nothing wrong. Just because I wasn't having the chance I needed to build up my character. I wanted to come out into the open places and begin all over again."

Nick fastened him with eyes that were cold and hard in their disbelief.

"I'll check up on you. If you're on the dodge I'll get the goods on you." And he strode out.

I waited until Smith raised his eyes. "I wouldn't let men talk to you like that, Smith. The boys around here will get you tabbed as a coward if you let Nick Cryder ride you around the reservation with his spurs on."

"What could I do?" he said. "The man's an officer of the law."

"Cryder's a bully," I told him. "Nearly all men are bullies. You get just the sort of treatment you expect in this world. You act like a cur that expects to be kicked and you'll get kicked. And in this country men kick harder and faster than any other place in the world."

I thought that might buck him up. It didn't.

Smith kept on assisting the timekeeper. Cryder saw him twice and took occasion to ride him both times. Men listened and sneered. After that they all rode Smith—and made him like it.

He had a little cabin up a valley back of the mine. It had been an old prospector's place. The prospector and the mine owners had tangled in court, and one night the prospector was shot. Cryder had never done much about the shooting. Cryder was crooked, of course.

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A deputy sheriff who hangs around a camp where gambling and saloons run wide-open has to be crooked, or just dumb. Cryder wasn't dumb.

I dropped in to see Smith one Sunday afternoon; I thought I'd cheer him up a bit. It was no use. He sat there in the dark cabin, the stuffy air smelling of human occupancy and stale cooking, with his head in his hands. A dog crouched at his feet. It was a police dog, after a fashion, but its spirit had been broken.

When I stepped on the board porch in front of the cabin Smith jumped to his feet, his face stark with fear. The dog tucked his tail between his legs and crawled under the table. I could see the yellow gleam of its eyes.

"Got a dog, eh?"

"Oh, it's you! Yes. I found him a couple of days ago. He was running down the street, with some kids throwing rocks at him. I sympathized with him and brought him home."

I thought of the little town sprawled out in the blistering sun, the dusty street, the temper of the urchins who had learned to curse almost as soon as they had learned to talk.

"A dog of his size that would stand his ground wouldn't have rocks thrown at him," I said.

He nodded, but the nod didn't have any interest. I talked with him a while and left. I spat in the dust and washed my hands of both of them.

It was Big Bertha who made the next move in the game. Big Bertha didn't fit into the picture the way you'd have expected. She drifted into town, opened a lunch counter, and bucked the competition of the restaurants, putting one out of business, and making the other one change cooks.

Cryder tried to throw a scare into Big Bertha. She heard what he had to say, then she spoke her piece.

"Listen, you tin-star braggart! I come here to mind my own business. I'm on the square. I quit a circus, where I handled everything from elephants to lions, and I ain't going to let no four-flusher bluff me out now. If you don't like my competition—buy me out! If the bootleg twins who tried to corner the trade in the restaurant business want to get rough, I'll get rough too!"

Cryder had called on her in an effort to stick her for some fancy license under a town ordinance he'd thought up. The town wasn't incorporated. Big Bertha had refused to pay.

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I was in Bertha's place when she saw the dog. It was the first time Smith had brought him into town.

"No dogs," said Bertha when Smith came to the door.

He nodded and turned into the little screened porch that kept out the flies. The dog lay down just back of him.

"Ham-and," he said.

She broke the eggs and put them on the fire.

There was a yelp. They both looked up, Big Bertha and Fred Smith. The dog was running down the street with his tail between his legs. Harry Fane was standing by the door, banging rocks at him and laughing.

"That's Fred Smith's dog," said Big Bertha.

Fane came in and slid onto a stool.

"I don't give a damn whose dog he is. When I want to throw a rock at a dog, I do it. You got anything to say, Smith?"

Smith kept his eyes down on the counter.

After a while Big Bertha turned back to the stove. Fred's ham-and was done. She slid it over to him. Smith ate in a hurry. He wanted to get out. Bertha looked at me and shrugged her big shoulders.

The dog came back whining, looking for Smith, afraid to go near the place, circling around out of stone's throw. Big Bertha dried her hands on her apron and went to the door.

"Come here," she said.

The dog paused, watching her with yellow eyes. She picked up a scrap of meat and whistled. He came then, crawling the last of the distance on his belly, making little whining noises with his mouth. Bertha gave him the meat and watched him.

Fane got to the floor and stamped his foot. The dog yelped and turned to run. Fane laughed. Big Bertha turned to him.

"When I'm making friends with a dog," she said, cold and level-like, "you keep yourself outa my affairs. That's a good dog. He's been ruined somewhere and made to be afraid of everybody and everything."

Fane met her eyes, hesitated. He had things pretty much the way he wanted them in this little desert town. Fane controlled the liquor and the dance halls. He stood in with Cryder, of course.

"Don't go gettin' hard," he mumbled.

Big Bertha snorted. Then she called the dog back.

"It ain't right for a dog to associate with a man that's afraid," she told Smith.

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"Who says I'm afraid?" asked Smith, finishing up his ham and eggs in a big gulp.

"I do," said Big Bertha.

Smith pushed a coin over the counter and hurried out.

Big Bertha held the dog's collar. "You stay here with me," she told it.

I tried to interfere. "That dog's the only companion Fred Smith's got."

"I can't help it," she said. "I like animals. This dog has got too much in him to be ruined just so some man won't be lonesome. He was a good dog once. Probably got lost or was stolen by somebody who didn't understand dogs. He lost his self-respect. The man probably beat him when he should only have talked with him. The dog got some little fear, and then he got another little fear, and finally it got to be a big fear, and then fear got to be a habit."

"You can't cure him now," I warned her, interested in spite of myself. "Take Fane, for instance—that dog'll always be afraid of Fane, as long as he lives."

Fane laughed. He was the sort of fellow who got a kick out of having people and dogs afraid of him.

Big Bertha snorted at us both. "Shows all you know about it! Of course I couldn't make him overcome a big fear just by reasoning with him or struggling with him. But I can find out the little fears and get him to conquering them. After that the big ones will take care of themselves. Fear and doubt are just habits an animal picks up."

Big Bertha led the dog back of the counter and began talking to it. Her voice was low but packed with authority. The dog whined at her as though he was trying to answer. They were talking to each other when I went out the door.

Twice in the next week I saw the dog. Both times he was running. I didn't actually see Fane throw anything the first time. The second time I saw the motion of his arm as he flung a stone. He was laughing when he went into Bertha's place. I followed him in.

"Fane," I said, "you lay off that dog."

He looked at me with eyes that were menacing in their hostility.

"Your business?" he asked.

"I'm making it my business."

"Maybe," said Fane, "he's a brother of yours."

He dodged my left. His right hand was clawing at a shoulder

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holster under his armpit. My right connected. He staggered back, skidded over a stool, crashed into the wall, and hit the floor. As he went down his right hand came free, and I caught the glitter of blued steel.

I was unarmed. Folks don't carry hardware with them in the desert any more, not as a rule. There was just a chance I could fling one of the stools and block the bullet. I grabbed the nearest stool.

"That'll be all for this time," remarked Big Bertha casually, leaning over the counter. She had a sawed-off shotgun in her hands, and the twin muzzles were pointing right at Fane's stomach. He lowered his gun.

Cryder came on the run. He sided with Fane; that was to be expected. They fined me fifty dollars and gave me a suspended sentence of thirty days—disturbing the peace, assault and battery. They tried to hang a felony charge of assault with a deadly weapon on Big Bertha, but she outfoxed them. She packed up and said she was going down to see the grand jury. Cryder almost got down on his knees to her.

I told Bertha I was sorry, but I always hated to see a man pick on a dog. She shrugged her big shoulders.

"That's for the dog to settle," she told me, speaking as though she was talking about a growing child's education. "If a dog expects he's going to be kicked, there'll always be somebody to kick him. A man's got to respect himself to get respect from others. It's the same way with a dog."

He was lying on the floor at her feet. It seemed as though he understood every word she said.

I commented on it.

"Sure he understands," said Big Bertha. "He's a smart dog. That's one of the troubles with him: he's too sensitive. But he's going to work out of it all right."

The dog whined eagerly.

"Named him yet?" I asked.

"Growls," she answered.

"A heck of a name. Should have called him Yelps."

She frowned. "That's intended as a wisecrack, I guess, but it ain't funny."

It was three weeks before I saw Fane and the dog together again. Fred Smith was with me. He was servile in his desire to square

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himself. He talked too much and too fast. I listened to about half of it—some long-winded explanation about his nerves and his health.

He saw the dog in front of Bertha's place and whistled. The dog came trotting across the street. He was glad to see Fred, no mistake about that.

Halfway across the street a rock skidded the dust just under his belly. I looked at the corner. Fane was picking up another rock.

Fred Smith got white in the face. He looked from me to Fane, from Fane to the dog.

I remembered what Bertha had said about its being up to the dog; but I remembered some other things about Fane, and I started for the corner. They could unsuspend that jail sentence. Fane and I were due for an argument, and this time there was something under my own left armpit. This argument was going just as far as Fane wanted it to go.

But the dog was the one that settled things.

He acted for a second as though he wanted to run. Then he turned, hesitated, growled, and the growl reassured him. He started for Fane, and Fane's hand dropped the rock as though it had been hot. When the dog saw Fane was afraid, he charged.

Fane's right hand went for his holster. The dog crouched, with a yellow gleam of hatred in his eyes. Fane glanced over his shoulder, saw a saloon door swing invitingly, and popped in. The dog sprang just as the door closed.

I looked at Fred Smith. The expression on his face was a mixture of pride and shame—pride for the dog, shame for himself.

I walked over and told Big Bertha about it. Smith went with me.

Bertha was calm. "He's been getting over his little fears," she said. "Now he's ready to tackle some big ones. He'll get cured fast now. It ain't so much of a trick to train animals if you just have patience and realize that habit is the most powerful thing in the world."

Fred Smith leaned over the counter. He spoke so fast the words all ran together.

"Could you do it with me? Could you take me and cure me of whatever is the matter with me? I'd be just like a dog. I'd put myself in your charge, do everything you said. I'd give anything if I could only be like other men and have respect. It's been hell . . ."

Big Bertha stared at him.

"You'd have to have something to make you remember you were

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being trained," she told him, "something that was with you all the time—a glove on your right hand or something like that."

"I'd do anything," said Fred.

"I wonder if you would?" she mused, and her eyes were narrowed in thought.

I got out. It seemed as though they were better off alone. I began to wonder if Bertha's mother instinct wasn't making her take too much interest in this apology of a man, who had been ruined by fear and had now come to dread fear itself.

A week or so after that I first heard the whisper about the dog collar. They said Smith was wearing a dog collar under his flannel shirt. The man who told me said it was a sign of insanity.

I didn't say anything, not to him. I did to Bertha.

"Wasn't that rubbing it in?" I asked.

She shrugged her massive shoulders. "It had to be something that would make him think more of his training than of himself. A man can get accustomed to a glove. He'll have the devil of a time getting accustomed to a dog collar."

"He'll lose his self-respect," I said.

"He ain't got any."

"The men will kid him about his collar."

"That'll make him remember what it's on there for. He's got to get in a fight before he's much better."

"He'll get an unmerciful licking."

"Of course, but after that he won't be afraid of a licking. And if the men know he'll fight, they won't pick on him so much."

"You may be a first-rate animal trainer," I told her, "but you can't pull that stuff with men."

She didn't even bother to contradict me. "We got some good roast beef," she said.

I was halfway through the meal when Fred Smith came in. He'd been in a fight that must have been a massacre. His lips were split, one eye was closed, the other was all puffed up. His shirt was torn and covered with dust. There was a trickle of red stains from his nose.

Big Bertha looked at him as though she saw nothing out of the ordinary. "We got some good roast beef," she said.

"Gimme an order," he murmured through swollen lips.

She passed him over an order. His hands were trembling with excitement, and the fork jiggled a tune against the edge of the plate.

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"Your dog's ready to come back," she said.

"Back?"

"Yes. Back to you. I've got him trained."

Smith drank a glass of water in big gulps and choked on the last gulp.

A man tapped me on the shoulder.

"Your name's Dunn?"

I nodded.

"Sam Flint wants to know if you can come to the mine right away. It's important."

I paid my check and followed the man to the dusty street. He had an automobile with the motor running. I got in, and the man snapped the gears home. We lunged forward in a swirl of dust. I noticed that several other cars were starting out in a great hurry.

"What's happened?" I asked the man at the wheel.

"Another payroll holdup."

"Did they get the roll?"

"Yes, and they got Ed Manse."

I said nothing more. Neither did the man. The facts could wait. Flint would want to tell them in his own way. Sam Flint was the main squeeze at the mine. He had been an old fighter, in the earlier days. Now he was getting along, but he could still fork a horse and pull iron.

He was pacing the rough board floor of the mining office when I came in.

"Dunn, you busted up some cattle rustlers down in New Mexico."

"I was in on some action there, yes."

"And they say you can read trail."

"I've read trail, some."

"All right. You're employed as special investigator by the mine. I want action. Also, there's a two-thousand-dollar reward for the arrest and conviction of the man or men who pulled the job."

"What job?"

"Murder, robbery. They got Ed Manse. I'm going out. Got some shooting irons along?"

"I could use an extra one."

He gave me a Winchester and an old single-action Colt, one of the kind you draw mostly by the hammer. It shot a bullet that did violent things to a human being.

"Let's go," he said.

The afternoon sun was slanting purple shadows along the ridges.

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It stays light pretty late up in those altitudes in the middle of summer. The hot wind had died down. The horizons had quit their heat dance of midday and were showing steady.

We jolted along the truck road, then swung out on a twisting dirt road that runs toward the Las Vegas highway. After five or six miles we came to a little knot of men, a couple of automobiles, and something stretched out on the ground, the face covered by a blanket.

Dead men are pretty gruesome, no matter how you take them. A man who has been shot in the heat of the day on the desert is something a man with a weak stomach has no business looking at. The red had baked black in the hot sun, where it had oozed over the little rocks that lay on the surface of the desert. Flies buzzed around in angry circles. The blanket was swarming with them.

Sam Flint strode toward the still form. Nick Cryder pulled back the blanket.

"He put up a battle," said Cryder.

That much was evident. There were tracks all around in the sand, places where feet had dug deep. Manse had got some bruises on his face before the shot had torn away the top of his head. There were two other bullet wounds, one in his chest, one just over the belt buckle. His gun was gone.

Sam Flint read signs on the ground just as though he had been reading a printed page.

"Lone bandit," he said. "Blocked the road, got the drop, made Manse stop the car and get out. Took his gun away, and then reached for the bag. Manse tackled him. The bandit clubbed his gun, cracked him on the face. Then he shot him in the shoulder. Manse kept on. The next shot caught him in the stomach. Manse fell back. The shot that did things to his head was fired after he lay back on the ground."

Nick Cryder nodded. "That's the way I dope it."

Sam Flint met his gaze steadily.

"Dusty Dunn's going to do some special investigation for us on this thing. There's a two-thousand-dollar reward."

Nick Cryder tilted back the brim of his hat. The setting sun made little ridges and valleys in the tanned skin of his face.

"You haven't got full confidence in me?" he asked. His tone was as hard as his eyes.

Flint met his eyes. "No," he said, "I haven't."

Cryder turned to me. "Well, I'll tell you a few things. You've been hostile before, Dunn. You can guard anything you want, but you can't start out making arrests, and you can't start out trying to run

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down any criminals. That stuff is my business. What's more, you can't wear a gun unless you're a deputy."

He made a step toward me, then stopped.

"The law says I can wear a gun when I'm going on a hunting trip or returning from one," I said, "if you're wanting to get technical."

"That ain't got anything to do with it. You can't strut around here as a special officer, without authority."

I smiled at him. "I'm going on a hunting trip. Just starting."

Cryder thought things over for a minute. Then he turned to Flint.

"All right! But don't interfere with me—I've got the man spotted. Fred Smith drifted in here from Los Angeles. He's wanted there. His real name is Fred Gates. There's a forgery and embezzlement warrant out for him. I'm on his trail. He knows it. And he's wearing a few bruises; he's the one that did the job. I'm the first to tell you about it, and that means I get the reward."

Flint shook his white locks back from the perspiration on his forehead. "You arrest the right man and get a conviction, and you get the reward."

I looked around at the tracks. They had been messed up a little. There were powder burns around the bullet hole in the shoulder and the one that had taken off the top of his head. There were no powder burns around the hole in his stomach. That bullet had gone through from an angle.

I walked off into the desert, poking around.

The sun set. The Funeral Range showed a jagged silhouette against the sky. Breathless silence gripped the desert.

"What are you doing out there?" shouted Cryder.

"Walking," I called back.

"Come help us load the body."

I pretended I didn't hear him. After the sun once sets, it gets dark in that country pretty fast, and I wanted to find what I was looking for.

They had the body loaded and the car started before I found it. It was behind a little clump of greasewood, a place where someone had stretched out at full length. I looked around the ground. There was the glitter of a brass tube, a single empty cartridge thrown out from a rifle. I smelled it. It was fresh.

I followed the man's trail back to the automobile road. The man who had ambushed himself there had left the automobile that had figured in the holdup, walked diagonally across the desert, and tucked himself in behind the greasewood.

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Sam Flint came over to where the trail met the road.

"Find something?"

"Yes. There were two of 'em," I pointed out. "When Manse was held up he only saw the lone man in front of him. There was another here in ambush. Manse watched his chance and tackled the man with the gun. He tore his mask off.

"The man behind the greasewood turned loose and caught him in the stomach. The other fellow managed a shot in the shoulder. Those two shots put Manse on his back, dying. The third shot was because he wasn't dying fast enough. The only reason it was necessary was because he'd seen the face of the man who stopped him and asked for the cash. He tore off tne mask—you can see where the cord cut the skin on his fingers. He must have given it a big yank."

Sam Flint stroked his chin. His eyes were staring at me through the gathering dusk.

"Any idea who they were?"

"I'd like to see Fane, on a hunch," I told him, "and see if there isn't a welt along the back of his head, such a welt as might be made by the cord when a mask is torn off."

"And the man behind the greasewood?"

I shrugged. But we both turned toward Nick Cryder.

They took the body back to town. There was lots of excitement. I hunted up Big Bertha.

"Who had Fred Smith been fighting with?"

"He didn't say."

"Where did he go?"

"Don't know. He left before he'd eaten much, took the dog and beat it. Too excited to eat, I guess."

I kept watching her, waiting for her to raise her eyes to mine. She didn't do it.

"Maybe someone said something about the holdup and murder about the time he left?"

She kept her eyes on the floor for a second, then raised them to mine.

"You're a fool!" she spat at me, but the words lacked conviction. I could see there was a doubt in her mind.

I started up the trail back of the mine, the one that led to Fred Smith's shack. It was dark now, save for the stars and the curl of a new moon that hadn't yet reached the first quarter.

I could hear the sound of my feet crunching along the gravel, and then I stepped into the sand of the desert. The sand gave forth little

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whispering noises. The hills drew together, and then I came out in the little valley. There was a light in the house. I could see shadows moving across the light.

There were five men there: Cryder, Fane, and three cronies. Cryder had a black bag. It was splotched with red and was empty. He held it up before him and pointed out the red stains to the others. Fred Smith was not there.

I turned to go back. There was talk of lynching. The men in the cabin behind me were cursing and making threats.

I figured Smith hadn't returned down the trail; he'd kept on up the valley. So I circled the cabin and started up the slithering sand of the valley floor.

It was a barren valley, surrounded by mountains that were baked slopes of colored stone. Here and there was a clump of sage or greasewood, at times a stunted cactus. The moon was low, the stars were giving a little light. The mountains cut the sky with a wall of silence.

I wondered if Smith knew.

After a while I saw the beam of a flashlight cut the dark behind me. The manhunt was on. The two who had done the crime were ready to pin it on the man who hadn't. And they planned that he would never be able to deny it. My only chance was to keep between that posse and its quarry. I wondered if the other three men knew the plot or were just dupes.

Of course, I had no proof—only the knowledge that there had been two men in the holdup, that Manse had been killed because he had seen a face. The whole thing hinged on the man behind the greasewood, the one who had fired from ambush.

I came to the slope of the mountains and whistled a note of warning.

"Smith!" I called. "Oh, Fred Smith! It's Dusty Dunn."

There was no answer, no echo. The desert swallows up sounds like that. Behind me I could hear the posse. They were coming fast; their flashlights helped them make time.

I knew they'd be likely to take a shot at me if they saw me. I gave one more low call for Smith, but there was no answer. I hoisted myself up onto a ridge, stretched along an outcropping of rock that was still warm from the heat of the day, and waited.

They didn't see my tracks at all—going it blind. When they came to the mountains they split up into two parties. Harry Fane and

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Nick Cryder came up my side of the canyon. I could hear them talking.

"You've got to watch out for Dusty Dunn." It was Fane's voice.

"He's not going to start anything," said Cryder.

Fane snorted. "Shows all you know about it! He's been snooping around and found out where someone lay out behind the greasewood and took a shot at Manse."

"How do you know?"

"That's what Sam Flint told someone."

"Wait a minute. We better think this one over some," said Cryder. "That complicates matters."

"That's what I was telling you."

They came to a stop and Fane did a lot of talking, while Cryder was thinking.

"We gotta be mighty careful," Fane finished. "Flint says Dusty Dunn knows Manse tore off a mask, and—"

A rock rattled.

"Somebody up that ridge!" Cryder yelled, and jumped forward. A dog barked. Cryder cast the beam from his flashlight up the dark slope. For a moment the beam groped against the side of the hill, then it picked up the green eyes of a dog. The beam shifted a bit, and there was Fred Smith.

"I heard you," he said. "You two were the stickups."

I pinched myself. Was this Fred Smith, coming out of hiding and walking straight toward two armed murderers who would have to kill him to protect themselves?

He came on toward them. Cryder fired. The bullet spat into the ground; it had missed Smith by inches. Smith tried to dodge, lost his footing, and came rolling down the slope. The dog sprang forward, yellow teeth gleaming.

As Fane fired I got into action and took a shot at the flashlight. I missed it, but the crossfire made them jump for cover.

And then the dog connected. He went for Fane's throat in a spring that made him thud against Fane's chest with a jar and sent them both crashing to the earth.

Fred Smith was running straight and low like a football player, coming for Nick Cryder. And Nick Cryder was taking deliberate aim. He wasn't going to miss this time.

I hated to interfere, but Smith was running into lead. I had a good chance to get Cryder's hip as it was silhouetted against the beam

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of the flashlight, and I fired. The shot bowled him over just as Fred Smith tackled.

There were shouts; men came on the run. I stood on the ridge and held them back. Smith and the dog did their stuff in the canyon below. It was all over in a few seconds; they were lively seconds, too. Cryder's cronies were hostile, but I kept my guns in my hands and we all went back to town together.

Cryder had to be carried. Fane was frightened more than hurt. He'd managed to hold his arms in front of his face when the dog jumped, and his arms had been pretty badly chewed up.

After we got to town there wasn't much left to do. We found the payroll buried back of Cryder's shack. He'd planted the empty bag at Smith's cabin. The town was pretty talkative all night, and Fane made a confession. He tried to put all the blame on Cryder.

But Cryder was able to show that he was the man behind the greasewood brush. That meant that Fane had fired the fatal shot, the one that had lifted Manse's skull. That was because Manse had seen Fane's face behind the black mask.

When the excitement died down we found that Fred Smith was something of a hero. Sam Flint doubled the reward and split it between Fred and me. I thought of what Cryder had said about Smith being really Fred Gates, wanted in Los Angeles, but I didn't say anything. I'd been employed to get the bandits. Flint could do the broadcasting.

Fred Smith disappeared the next afternoon. He just faded from town, and Big Bertha and the dog went with him. No one knew when they'd gone, or where. They simply weren't around.

I didn't hear of them for more than two months. Then I got a marked copy of the Los Angeles *Times*. The article blocked out with a pencil was quite brief.

On its face it contained little of interest, merely reported the criminal trial of three directors of some corporation. They had been convicted of embezzlement, alteration of records, and forgery.

The article said that the directors had originally placed the blame on the assistant manager, who had become panic-stricken and fled, although innocent. He had felt that his word against that of three directors would not be accepted. But he had returned, faced the charges and the lying directors, demanded an investigation, fought the case to a conclusion, and uncovered evidence which had exposed the conspiracy.

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The name of the assistant manager was Fred Gates. The article mentioned that he had assumed the name of Fred Smith following his abrupt departure from the city.

They never returned to the Armagosa country. The old prospector's cabin is deserted; the wind whips the sand against the sides of the unpainted shack, and the sand hisses little whispers. It seems as though the old house and the drifting sand are whispering together about the gossip of the desert country.

I've heard it many a time, and I wonder if the old shack doesn't tell the drifting sand the story of the man who conquered the lesser fears and then tackled the big fear.

DETECTIVERSE

DISHONEST INJUN

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

Outlaw Fast Buck, a renegade Sioux,
Was adept at whatever he'd dioux.
His favorite prank
Was to burgle a bank
And escape without leaving a clioux.

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a *NEW* short story by

CLEMENTS JORDAN

Joey's doctor "confessed what we had feared for some time—Joey was 'slow,' but 'not everyone developed at the same rate. Maybe later—' " The truth was that Joey was retarded, and needed more care and compassion, more loyalty and love, than most children . . .

HAS ANYONE SEEN JOEY?

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

Once I had a brother—a lively, laughing boy whom I loved dearly, most of the time. But often I hated him and wished passionately to be rid of him. I have been rid of him now for more than forty years and would give anything to hear him laugh again, but that cannot be. Some of the questions—why? how? who? where?—must forever nag my mind. I can answer some of them now, I think.

Our mother had died at Joey's birth when I was three. When Joey was brought home from the hospital, Daddy led me in to see him small and red in his crib. "You are his big sister and will have a wonderful time with him. You can play mommy all you want to," Daddy said through tears, "because our Mommy won't come back to us any more." I had been the center of adoring attention and wanted to go on being the baby myself. "I don't want him. He is ugly," I said. "He is beautiful. You will love him very soon," Daddy said, smiling a little. He was right—about the loving.

He installed Mrs. Herbert as housekeeper. She was an excellent woman, a good cook, firm and fair to Joey and me. I began to approach Joey's crib, becoming interested in spite of myself. He ate, gained weight, slept, cried rarely, but ignored us no matter how we tapped on his crib, called his name, or dangled bright objects before

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him. "Just wait," Daddy promised, but he said it with less and less certainty six, seven, eight months later when Joey continued to ignore us.

At the age of one year Joey began to struggle like a creature emerging from a cocoon. His shoulders broadened and his arms threshed about and strengthened. His legs developed poorly. He learned to pull himself briefly to a sitting position by grasping the bars of his crib. His doctor confessed what we had feared for some time—Joey was "slow," but "not everyone developed at the same rate. Maybe later—"

At the age of two he crawled and pulled up by holding onto furniture, but still did not walk. When asked, he announced that his name was "Oey" for which we hugged and kissed him.

At the age of three he could take several steps but fell so often that we marveled that he had the courage to keep trying to walk. His knees were continually bruised and he whimpered when he fell on them. He still said his name was "Oey," but what had been endearing at two was not appealing at three.

At the age of four he could walk longer without falling. When I came home from school, I would take him into the yard and bounce a big ball toward him. He would make no effort to catch it but, when it rolled, he would scramble after it, pick it up, and bring it to me, tripping if he hurried. He had added five or six more words to his vocabulary. He still called himself "Oey."

Then Daddy presented us with a new mother. He had been leaving the house after supper for months but I was completely surprised when he brought her home one Sunday and introduced her as our new mother. She was pretty and smiled a lot. I don't know why I did not like her. I knew she did not like me either though she was civil and carefully kind even when Daddy was absent. But she despised Joey. She flinched from touching him as though he were unclean or contagiously ill. Daddy did not seem to notice.

I had accepted Joey but often wished to abandon him in favor of playmates. Now, in the face of her dislike, I became his fierce champion. Often I took him aside and coached him until I became exasperated and he exhausted.

"Your name *J*oey. Say *J*oey!"

"Ame Oey."

"No, no, *not* *O*ey! *J*oey!"

"Ot Oey, *O*ey," he would agree, smiling sunnily.

Next I would try the picture book of winsome animals, turning

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to each and repeating its name over and over clearly and firmly. He adored the brown spotted dog. "Og," he said one day to my boundless delight. Seeing my pleasure, he pointed to the cat, the cow, the lamb, and the hen, and said, "Og, og, og, og." Tears came into my eyes. "Ame *O*ey, ot Oey," he comforted me. This was one of many sessions, for I had dreams of bringing Joey along until he was the equal of anyone his age so that our stepmother *must* love him—and of course I would be acclaimed the world's greatest teacher.

If anything, her aversion grew. She gave me almost complete charge of Joey. I woke and dressed him in the morning. I fed him breakfast, for toast was all he could manage alone. Mrs. Herbert fed him lunch, but I could see my stepmother's face smooth out when I returned from school to take over. I would gather him to me as he chuckled with glee and stumbled to meet me. I could feel the tension in his body and realized that all day he had been suppressed and pent up. There was no place he could be let out with safety.

At six Joey was larger in girth but still short for his age. His legs seemed insubstantial. His hands and feet were stubby. When I took him places, his flipper hand was so hard to hold on to that I had to extend my hold to his wrist. When he tried to hurry, he tripped and fell. He used a few more words but not in sentences. His name was still "Oey." But he had one more accomplishment. He had learned a version of Redlight, a game very popular that summer.

The house across from us, on the corner, had been razed. It had been huge and vast piles of timber and bricks were still heaped on the ground. All kinds of little steps and underground passages were partially exposed. There had been some attempt to board these over, but the place was posted and considered dangerous after dark. There was some cleared ground, however, and the neighborhood kids gathered at dusk to play Redlight.

I had been trying to teach Joey numbers and to my gratification he had learned to apply them to this game. He would march to his base, turn his back, and shout, "Ee, o, eben, et, edite!" He enunciated so slowly that it took him longer than anyone else took to call the numbers. Everyone was able to steal across his line, but Joey did not care. Joyfully he turned to greet them, his mouth so wide in laughter that his eyes squinted. He was incapable of understanding that he was supposed to prevent anyone from crossing his line. It was impossible for him to believe that it was no honor to be "It." He was satisfied to count forever, to turn and greet the victors with laughing congratulation until darkness ended the game.

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At first the kids enjoyed the novelty. They ran screaming across the line. They called others to "come play with dummy." They vied with each other in whacking Joey on the back in pretended camaraderie. Through it all Joey beamed, although often, when I undressed him for bed, I saw red marks on his back.

They soon grew bored. They ceased to find satisfaction in a game they could never lose. It was no fun to tease someone impervious to insult, immune to pain. They started playing games beyond Joey's ability. For a while Joey would cross to the lot, turn, and count. Some kids called half-hearted insults. Dennis Leach grabbed him around the knees and threw him to the ground. But for the most part they ignored him. Forbidden to cross the street, he would stand at our gate, looking wistfully at the playing children and chanting, "Ee, o, eben, et, edite."

My stepmother found him increasingly detestable but I did not realize how hateful he was to her until he took ill. Joey's health had been good, but that August he lay in his crib flushed with fever. The doctor diagnosed it as a virus and said there was nothing to worry about. But Joey's fever soared, his pajamas and bedding became soaked with his sweat, his teeth chattered, his eyes rolled to their whites.

His nursing devolved on Mrs. Herbert and me for my stepmother claimed she was not well. By turns we gave him medicine, bathed the heat from his body, dressed him in dry clothing, spread fresh sheets, gave him the water he so insatiably craved, but which he so often could not retain. For days we were not sure that Joey would win his fight.

Then one morning Joey's eyes were open and clear. He smiled weakly. My stepmother, looking in at the door, took in the news at a glance. The way her face changed made me think that she was sorry that Joey was better.

Joey swiftly improved, but conditioned by worry, I still rose in the night to tiptoe into his room to check on him. It was on one of those nights that I heard talk from my father's room—not clearly, for they were trying to keep their voices down.

He: Trust fund . . . much each month . . . no school.

She: In a home . . . violent . . . baby.

He: Good-natured . . . never hurt . . . trust fund.

She: Never afford . . . our baby.

Joey slept peacefully. Asleep, he looked as smart as anyone, I

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thought. Thankful that he was well at last, I stole to my bed and fell soundly asleep.

My stepmother had grown plumper and a bit clumsy and one morning, while she still slept, Daddy told me proudly that I'd have a new brother or sister around Christmas. "You must be all the help you can right now," he pleaded. "Amuse Joey and try not to let him worry her. You must be my big girl."

I wanted to say that I'd done more for Joey than she had, that she hated him, but I saw that he looked tired and older than I had ever noticed. "Sure, I will," I promised. He placed his cheek against mine and kissed Joey's brow. "I know I can depend on you," he said.

In two weeks school would begin. What would become of Joey? Could Mrs. Herbert keep him safe? The words I had overheard, imperfectly understood, occurred to me now and then and unsettled my mind. I realized that "baby" meant the one she was expecting. I didn't know what a trust fund was.

I heard the "home" mentioned one night at supper. Joey was hungry and became impatient when I interrupted my feeding of him to eat a morsel of my own. He was fond of lima beans and scooped up a spoonful, but succeeded in delivering only a couple of them to his mouth. The others spilled over his chin onto his shirt. Joey brushed at the liquid, massaging it into his shirt, but he captured one of the beans. He poked it into his mouth, beaming on us triumphantly.

My stepmother broke into sobs and said bitterly to Daddy, "And you say he doesn't belong in a home?"

"Elsie, please, let's talk about this later."

"You mean after you've tied up all our money?"

"Jennie, take Joey into the kitchen and give him the rest of his supper there. Elsie, please, dear, you'll make yourself sick."

"I'm sick of a lot of things," I heard her say as I picked up our plates of dinner. When I returned to help Joey from his high chair, they were quiet. They did not look at each other or at me.

I knew what "a home" was. I had overheard a woman say to her companion once when she passed Joey and me on the street, "That one ought to be in a home." I had clutched Joey's hand so tight that he had cried out. I knew that "a home" was a place where people were locked away, bound in chains, and guarded by attendants with clubs.

Alarmed for Joey, I began to listen at closed doors. Slowly I pieced together bits of nighttime conversations. Daddy's worries had come to a head since Joey turned six in May, the age a child normally

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started school. There was no school for Joey in our state and Daddy had been frantically writing to every place he could learn about. The answers were disheartening: Must be a resident of that state; inmates must be able to take care of their minimal needs; it would cost a great deal of money.

Daddy decided to put money in trust for Joey and keep him at home, hoping things would change some day or that if "anything happened to him," Joey would be provided for. Elsie was bitterly opposed to the "waste" of "all that money" which would deprive "her children." In her opinion "that boy" ought to be "put away" before he "got violent." Daddy would say that Joey had the best temper in the world and would never hurt anyone. Elsie would argue that Joey's "kind" always changed as they grew older.

When school started, I was caught up in enthusiasm in spite of myself. This year I had a friend. Debbie Lane was new and the teacher seated her next to me and asked me to show her around. We whispered, ate lunch together, and by the end of the first day were best friends. I was relieved, however, and ashamed, that she lived too far away to visit, although she kept saying that she was going to have her daddy drive her over to see me when he had time.

Then came October. We read ghost stories, carved pumpkins, and everyone was full of plans for Halloween costumes. Debbie said her mother was buying her a witch's costume with a pointed hat. What was I going to wear? I had never had a bought costume. Last year I had worn a sheet with a cut-out face outlined in black crayon. I said I didn't know. Could poor worried Daddy afford a costume?

"Well, goodness, you've got to dress up to go out."

I was too embarrassed to admit that I had never been "out" except to Mrs. Willet's house. She was a "shut-in" who loved children. She lived only two blocks from us and always had treats on special occasions for the neighborhood children. "I know what," Debbie shrieked. "I'll get my Daddy to drive me over to your house and we will go out together. Get a *big* bag." I did not know how to refuse. "I'll see," I said.

I broached the subject hesitantly at supper. Daddy seemed doubtful, but to my surprise my stepmother supported me. "Why not? And Joey will enjoy it too." Daddy said no, there would be such a mob of kids that Joey might get hurt. "Oh, let him go. Jennie will look after him. Her friend will help too."

In the three days remaining, my stepmother put herself out for me. A bought costume was too expensive, but she made me a long

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orange skirt out of her old party dress. With it I could wear her black sweater and a black mask. I was very pleased with myself. She bought Joey black tights. He would wear a black sweater and cap. She bought him a rubber mask with the face of an old bearded man. Joey hated it for it blocked his nostrils. I made the nose holes bigger, tied it on firmly, and told him sternly to leave it alone. I was ashamed of how glad I was that Debbie would not see him plain. At the last minute our stepmother made me fix pale yellow balloons to our shoulders—so that we could find each other in a crowd, she explained. Daddy's face cleared. He thought that a splendid idea.

We waited on the dark porch for Debbie—my idea. She was complimentary on Joey's costume. "Oh, he's like a little dwarf. How cute!" she trilled. "What's your name?" "Oey," he told her, and I hurriedly explained that he talked funny because his mask was tight. Debbie's father said he had to go and would meet us back at my house in an hour. He said he wished he had put a balloon on Debbie. I was overjoyed at the way our evening had started.

"Don't forget to visit Mrs. Willet. She will want to see your costumes," my stepmother reminded me.

Both sides of the street were crowded with witches, goblins, ghosts of all sizes. Joey's hand was sweating and I had to hold his wrist. He made gasping noises and I stopped and stretched his mask a little. Mrs. Willet's house was the last on her street and a crowd of kids was milling around her porch for she was known for her extra-special goodies. I made Joey hurry. I tried to remember everyone on her porch later—a fat ghost, a boy with a skeleton on his shirt, three goblins, kids with masks but no special costumes. One of these snatched my yellow balloon and popped it. We were giggling, shoving, and comparing treats.

I have tried to remember more for that was the last time I saw Joey.

Finally Mrs. Willet got to the door, leaning on her sister's arm. She exclaimed, "My, my!" over our costumes and handed out huge balls of popcorn covered with syrup mixed lavishly with walnuts. I stepped forward in my turn, raised my mask, and said, "It's me, Jennie, Mrs. Willet, and here's Joey."

Only there *wasn't* Joey. I was holding Debbie's wrist.

"Where's Joey?" I asked blankly.

"They went down that way," said Debbie.

"*Who* went that way?" I asked stupidly.

"Why, the big ghost. He ran funny, the ghost did. Your brother

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ran too. He fell down and the ghost picked him up. Didn't you see them? Are they playing a trick on you?"

I had not seen. I ran down the steps to the sidewalk, then around the corner shrieking, "Joey! Joey!" The kids scattered along the street joining in the confusion. No dwarf stumbled to meet me. My stomach caved in and I found it difficult to walk upright.

Daddy was in the living room listening to the radio. My stepmother had gone upstairs to lie down. When I gasped out my story, his first thought was for her. "Now, wait. Don't worry your mother. I'll find him. He can't be far." He took his big flashlight and hurried out. Debbie and I sat listening, unhearing, to the radio until her father came for her. Daddy returned much later baffled and unsuccessful. So were the police when they came and heard how Joey had been taken away.

It was after one o'clock when we realized my stepmother had not been told. We never did tell her. We found her lying, her neck at an angle, at the bottom of the attic stairs. A rip in the stair carpet told its sad tale.

Shocked, we just stared until my father said in an eerie conversational tone, "Now what was she doing in the attic?" Then he sat down on the bottom step, and the night caught up with him, and he wept aloud. He clasped me tightly, but I did not cry. Not until the funeral—and then only for Joey.

We published pictures in the paper with captions, "Have you seen this boy?" His costume was described. When we heard the doorbell or the telephone ring, we were sure it was news of Joey. Twice we journeyed hopefully across town and once to the police station. But all leads were false.

The police said they had looked everywhere—looked through abandoned houses, dragged a small pond miles away—and they would keep on looking. I don't remember when we gave up hope. We were robots, bereaved into lethargy. Weeks later I found my "treats" bag in the corner by the radio. Ants had got to the popcorn. I shuddered and threw everything away.

All that winter I dreamed of someone small and helpless with a rubber mask that I had wickedly made him wear even though it stifled him. Someone who, when asked his name, replied, "*O*ey, ot Oey"; who, stumbling in search of his home, kept tripping.

In the spring the rubble on the corner was cleared away and the remains of a little child clothed in shredded black, a rubber mask drawn tight over his nose, was unearthed from one of the cellars.

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Joey had escaped from his captor, had fallen in the dark, had been trapped to his death—that was the explanation finally accepted, by all but me. I found it impossible to imagine any enemy from whom Joey could have escaped. But at last we knew *where* he was.

Last year I found out *who*. Thankfully, my father never knew. He died last year and I cleaned out my childhood home preparatory to selling it. In the attic I found an old "treats" bag and in it an old sheet with holes cut for eyes, nose, and mouth outlined in black crayon, and under the sheet, a hard half-melted blob of pale yellow rubber.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

CHILD'S PLAY

by HAZEL L. COOPER.

One, two,
Marriage new.
Three, four,
Husband bore.
Five, six,
Dinner fix.
Seven, eight,
Husband ate.
Nine, ten,
Wed again.

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a *NEW* Raffles story by

BARRY PEROWNE

High adventure and derring-do on a top-priority assignment given to A. J. Raffles, the gentleman burglar, and his chronicler-in-crime, Bunny Manders. Their Most Secret Operation began on the day after the signing of the Armistice, at 11:00 A.M., November 11, 1918—a "special task" in the service of Section 0, the Allies' clandestine intelligence organization. What started out as a simple mission to pick up and deliver twelve cases of champagne, turned out to have more twists and detours, more unexpected developments, than Raffles, Manders, and Section O collectively dreamed of—right up to the very last turn of the road . . .

RAFFLES AND OPERATION CHAMPAGNE

by BARRY PEROWNE

"Does the name Gouvion Frères mean anything to you?" demanded Colonel Godfrey Lees-Garland.

"Champagne," said A. J. Raffles promptly.

Summoned to Paris by a coded telegram, Raffles and I, arriving at the Gare du Nord, had found a November mist dimming the streetlamps; but we had managed to get a taxi and had had ourselves driven to the Ritz, in the Place Vendôme.

Receiving us in his suite—for in his private capacity he was a member of the landed gentry and suites at the Ritz were his lifestyle—the Colonel immediately flung his question at us.

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"Yes," he said, confirming Raffles' reply, "Gouvion Frères is one of the great champagne firms of the city of Rheims."

Gaunt and bald, leathery and deeply furrowed of face, with shrewd eyes, the Colonel poured three whiskies from a decanter on the sideboard.

"I'll now tell you, Raffles and Manders," he said, handing us our glasses, "why I've called you chaps over from London. Very early this morning I was confidentially informed that within an hour or two of the signing of the Armistice at eleven a.m. yesterday, the eleventh of November, bringing an end at last to this damnable war, General Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the British sector in France, invited King George the Fifth to visit his troops in the line. The King's acceptance of the invitation was at once signalled to Sir Douglas."

Glass in hand, the Colonel prowled the room.

"As a matter of protocol," he went on, "the King's visit to France had, of course, to be cleared with the French Premier, old 'Tiger' Clemenceau—who, in approving the visit, added a suggestion of his own. Already in Paris, or on their way here, are certain eminent Allied statesmen—men of the calibre of President Wilson's adviser, the influential Colonel House. These eminent men are here for preliminary discussions on the terms of a definitive Treaty to be drawn up at a Peace Conference soon to convene formally at the Palace of Versailles. Premier Clemenceau suggested that King George, while in France, take the opportunity to meet some of these eminent statesmen. One hardly needs a prophetic eye to see that on the wisdom of these distinguished men depends the future, probably for generations to come."

Raffles nodded, intent. My heart was beginning to thump.

"I'm informed," Colonel Lees-Garland continued, "that a meeting has been rather hastily arranged. A luncheon is to take place two days hence at a rendezvous mutually convenient to the King, who will be at Haig's headquarters at St. Omer, and to the statesmen who are now in Paris. Twelve cases of champagne, a gross of magnums, have been ordered from Gouvion Frères. I'm told that this champagne is of a quite exceptional *cuvée*. Trust the French to know where to look for it! At this time when half the world is celebrating the Armistice, this wine is virtually priceless—liquid gold."

The Colonel gave us a searching look.

"The luncheon rendezvous, classified Most Secret," he said, "is the Château Rèmy-Latour, a secluded mansion in the forest just north

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of Versailles itself, between St. Omer and Paris. Because the rendezvous is secret, I've been instructed, as current head of Section O, the special-tasks unit of the Allies' clandestine intelligence organization, to arrange for the collection and delivery of the required champagne—which is why I've sent for you."

I took a gulp of my whisky.

"As soon as I got my orders this morning," Colonel Lees-Garland went on, "I telephoned to Count Jules Gouvion, head of Gouvion Frères. He had news for me. Now, as you know, until Uncle Sam threw his stovepipe hat into the ring, things looked grim for the Allies. It seemed that we'd lose Rheims. Consequently, though Count Gouvion himself is at his Rheims establishment, the required wine is not. He told me that most of the great champagne firms shifted their wines to safer areas. Gouvions shifted theirs well away to Normandy, where they own a deconsecrated Priory, the Prieuré de St. Gabriel, in the historic old town of St. Lô. They're using the Priory as emergency cellars.

"Count Gouvion told me to get in touch with his Cellarer, a Monsieur Yvonnec, who's been with the firm for many years. He is at the Priory with his Wine Porter, and has full authority there. I've spoken with the Cellarer on the telephone and arranged everything with him."

"And our orders, sir?" Raffles said.

"This persistent November mist," said the Colonel, "failed to damp the joy when the bells of half the world rang out in tumultuous thanksgiving at eleven a.m. yesterday. But the mist threatens fog to come, so your quickest way to Normandy will be by rail. You will spend the night here at the Ritz and leave for St. Lô, via Caen, by the first train in the morning. A compartment's been booked for you. On arrival at the Priory you'll find that the Cellarer has had the consignment loaded into Gouvion Frères transport, ready for instant collection."

Colonel Lees-Garland unlocked a drawer of the sideboard, took out an envelope and a military mapcase.

"I've marked the forest luncheon rendezvous, the Château Rèmy-Latour, on this map," he said. "In this envelope is authority for the Cellarer at St. Lô to hand over the consignment to you. You will deliver the consignment as early as possible to the major-domo in charge of preparations at the Château. I've impressed upon the Cellarer at St. Lô that in no circumstances whatever is he to release the consignment to anybody except two of my officers, uniformed

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and armed. That's why I instructed you, in my telegram, to wear the uniform of your substantive military ranks. Apropos—the war's over now, thank God, but I take it those revolvers in your holsters are still loaded?"

Seldom as Raffles and I wore uniform for our Section O work, our khaki was immaculate, our Sam Browne belts and our revolver holsters highly polished—and our revolvers, Raffles assured the Colonel, were indeed loaded.

"Not that I anticipate," said the Colonel, "any trouble for you on this job—Operation Champagne. Compared with some of the missions you've done for me, this one should be a cakewalk. It'll be your last job before you're demobilized and return to your civilian way of life."

Our civilian way of life as, ostensibly, gentlemen of independent means, had been financed by opportunistic larcenies, but Colonel Lees-Garland did not know this, or he might have had second thoughts before making us responsible for a consignment of liquid gold. I took a final gulp of my whisky.

"Just on the off-chance of your running into any difficulty, Raffles," said the Colonel, "I've obtained a formal Order of Mission for you from my superior, General De Sauvagnac, of Allied High Command. Before we go down to dine, you'd better take a look at this Order."

The document which Colonel Lees-Garland handed to Raffles could hardly have been more comprehensive. In French and in English, it read:

To: All Ranks, Allied Armies.

On production of this Order of Mission, the bearer, *Major A. J. Raffles* (I.D. S/4/828), is to be provided, immediately and unquestioned, with assistance of whatsoever nature he may stand in need.

(Sgd.): R. De Sauvagnac, GSO(I), for
FERDINAND FOCH, Marshal of France,
GENERALISSIMO, ALLIED ARMIES.

Over the wet green fields of northern France, on the day following our first postwar dinner at the Ritz, the mist steadily thickened. The train was crowded with Allied troops. Veterans of General Pershing's campaign in the Argonne sector, they were bound—an American officer who shared our first-class compartment told us—for early repatriation via Cherbourg.

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"They've certainly earned it, Major," Raffles said. "Your doughboys have put up a damned fine show."

"I'm happy to say the same for your tommies, Major," replied the American courteously.

We exchanged hip-flasks and cigarettes with him and discussed the probable shape of the world to come.

"I guess it all depends," the American major said shrewdly, "on this forthcoming Peace Conference at Versailles."

Agreeing, Raffles and I exchanged significant glances.

As the day wore on, the train's speed was reduced. More and more frequently the locomotive sounded its warning howl, and the audible jubilation of the homeward-bound troops began to give way to impatience. At prolonged, unscheduled stops at blurred red signals, the troops put their heads out of the windows and expressed their opinion of the Chemin-de-Fer de L'Etat by vehement outbursts which the American major referred to as "raspberries."

At Caen, Raffles and I left the troop train to continue its slow journey to Cherbourg—and by the time we ourselves reached St. Lô at last, the murky daylight was gone. Unseen in the darkness and fog that blanketed the old Norman town, a church clock was sonorously striking the hour, 6:00 p.m. Here and there dim lights showed, each ringed with a nimbus. A caped gendarme, of whom we inquired the whereabouts of the Prieuré de St. Gabriel, shone the ray of his bull's-eye over our khaki.

"Come with me," he said.

He guided us along a dark, meandering, cobblestoned street, where he soon halted, and with his bull's-eye, showed us a knocker on one of a pair of massive doors, rustily iron-studded, centuries old, set in an arch of lichened stone.

"Voilà, messieurs," he said, touched two fingers to his kepi, and left us.

Using the heavy knocker, Raffles pounded on the door. The iron reverberations died away in the fog. We waited. All was still. Raffles was about to knock again, but suddenly a spyslot in the door snapped open and a bright light shone out, dazzling us.

"Bon soir," said Raffles. "We have business with Monsieur Yvonnec, the Cellarer."

I sensed an eye looking over our khaki, then a voice said, in tolerable English, "What is your business with me?"

"This," said Raffles, and thrust into the slot our written authorization to collect the champagne consignment.

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The paper vanished, the slot snapped shut. In darkness we waited, then bolts and bars clattered. The ponderous doors creaked open just widely enough to permit our entry into the glare of a pressure-lamp. Two men, revolvers in hand, held us at gunpoint.

"I am the Cellarer," said the taller man, slender of build, wearing a white coat of the laboratory-technician kind, and a belt of keys. His tone was peremptory. "Your military identifications?"

We produced them. He snatched them from us. The other man, squat and muscular, a green baize apron over his sweater, was obviously the Wine Porter. His revolver in one fist, the pressure-lamp dangling from the other, he kept us covered as the Cellarer examined our credentials. The light shone on his smooth hair and thin, unlined, ascetic face, and his tension visibly relaxed as he returned our papers to us.

"Ça va, Jacques," he said to the Wine Porter, and gave us a bleak smile. "Strange days, gentlemen, these of the war's immediate aftermath. In the wake of victory come its camp followers—bacchanalia, rape, Army deserters steal out from their boltholes. In anticipation of high profits, black-marketeer gangs grow bold. They raid supply dumps and loot liquor storerooms—especially such as I have here in this Priory's cellars. You will understand my caution."

With his Wine Porter carrying the pressure-lamp, the tall Cellarer led us to a vehicle looming nearby in the fog of this cobblestoned courtyard.

"Transport is hard to come by these days," he said. "We use this sparingly, for local haulage, but it will serve your purpose."

The transport, a coupé of a model long outmoded, had a two-wheeled trailer attached, and the Cellarer, unfastening the rope that secured the trailer-cover, showed us the twelve wooden cases, firmly packed in the trailer and prominently stencilled Gouvion Frères, Rheims.

"As a matter of course," he said, refastening the trailer-cover, "champagne, bottled and in bin, is turned once daily—if the Cellarer knows his business. Where are you travelling to with this consignment?"

Raffles had taken the driver's seat in the coupé and, with his flashlamp, was examining the controls.

"The Persian poet, Omar Khayyam," said the Cellarer, "remarked that he 'often wondered what the vintner buys one half so precious as the goods he sells.' I could have told him in one word—gasoline.

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I have managed to provide you with a full tank. It should suffice. I take it you are going to Paris?"

"Bunny," Raffles said to me, "give the starting-handle a crank."

He switched on the brassbound headlamps, which bloomed feebly, staining the fog a bilious yellow. I cranked again and again with the starting-handle. Finally, the motor came to life, and I ran around and joined Raffles in the throbbing coupé, which was as cramped as a London hansom. Adjusting a lever on the steering-wheel quadrant, reducing the din, Raffles thanked the Cellarer for his services.

He replied, with frigid hauteur, "I expect this transport to be returned in due course—with a full tank."

"It will be," said Raffles.

Jacques, the musclebound Wine Porter, trundled open the archaic doors of the courtyard. The unseen church clock was striking again. Two resonant chimes, vibrating deeply in the fog, proclaimed the hour, 6:30 p.m., as we left the Prieuré de St. Gabriel and sought the road to Versailles.

Visibility, even when we had found our way on to the *route nationale*, was almost zero. I could not help remembering prewar times, when we had chosen just such nights as this for our ventures in crime.

"Raffles," I said, "our old London friend and 'fence,' Ivor Kern, would pay us a high price for this freight we're hauling."

The thought amused me. But Raffles, his tone meditative, said, "Bunny, the man *I* keep thinking of, in connection with this freight, would also pay us a high price for it, and he's not so far off as London. He's in Paris. What's more, he's a wine merchant, a prosperous one, and as you and I have reason to know, from one of our past ventures, he's a crook."

I felt a twinge of uneasiness.

"Raffles," I said, "we've kept an unblemished record throughout our war service—"

"So we'd be fools, now that we're practically on the eve of demobilization," Raffles said, "to risk blotting our character records? Sound thinking, Bunny! Any such risk, in the present circumstances, is out of the question. But the risk of a collision in this damned fog is well in the cards, so keep your eyes peeled."

He was watching the grassy road-edge himself, steering by what little could be seen of it in the glimmer of our debilitated headlamps. Very infrequently, vehicles—mostly Army type—came looming out of the fog. They passed us as cautiously as we passed them. But

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there was little traffic on the road, and gradually, as we kept steadily on for mile after mile, the strain of peering ahead into the fog began to tell on my eyes.

Cramped in our rattletrap coupé, I now and then—to keep myself awake—used my pocket flashlight to consult the map in the mapcase on my knees. I was none the wiser for doing so. Nor, in spite of my best efforts to the contrary, did I succeed in keeping my glazed eyes open.

It was a sense of cessation of movement that brought my lolling head up with a jerk that almost dislocated my neck.

The coupé, its lamps wanly illumining the fog, was at a standstill, with the motor running, and Raffles was saying, "We're at a Y-fork in the road. There's a signpost there, but I can't read it. Get out with your flashlight, Bunny, and see what's on the post."

The touch of the fog, chill on my face as I stumbled out of the coupé, somewhat revived me. Shining my ray of light up at the signpost, I called to Raffles, "Left for Argentan. Straight on for Vernoeuil and Versailles."

"Good," said Raffles. "We're well on our way."

As I moved back to the coupé, my flashlight-ray swivelled over it. My heart lurched. I stopped dead. My legs almost gave way.

"What's the matter?" said Raffles.

I hardly knew how to tell him. I had to clear my throat.

"The trailer," I said. "It's come uncoupled."

He got out of the coupé and added the ray of his flashlight to mine. He drew in his breath, deeply.

"We'll have to go back," he said, "and find the damned thing."

His theory was that our separation from the trailer must have occurred at one of the bad patches of *pavé* on the road.

"My fault," he said. "I ought to have realized this damned noisy rattletrap was pulling a bit easier."

Scanning the road-edges, Raffles the one on his side, me the one on mine, we made our slow way back for kilometer after kilometer over our route, and we found the trailer. It was standing, with a marked list, on the grassy road-marge. We got out of the coupé and with our flashlights examined the trailer. Its canvas cover still was roped down intact over the freight.

"No great harm done, after all," I said.

"Provided," Raffles said drily, "we can tow a two-wheeled trailer that has only one wheel."

I saw then, my heart sinking, what must have happened. Uncou-

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pled from the coupé, the trailer must have continued its journey independently, got onto a downslope, gathered speed, and struck an adjacent telegraph pole a glancing blow. This evidently had deprived one wheel of its hubcap, thus freeing the wheel to go rolling on, but abruptly halting the headlong progress of the trailer.

We spent a half-hour vainly searching the roadside ditches for the missing wheel, but it probably had rolled on for a long distance, leaving Operation Champagne stalled in the fog here—wherever here might be. Personally, I had no idea. But Raffles, standing by the coupé, was using his flashlight to consult the map in the map-case.

"While you were asleep," he said to me, "we passed through a small town that, as far as I can judge from this map, must have been Flers. I noticed a garage there. I'd better stay with the trailer and its freight, now that we've recovered it. You take the coupé, go to Flers, find that garage, and see if you can hire a van of some kind. Leave the coupé at the garage, for later collection, and get back here with alternative transport as quickly as—" He broke off. "No! Wait! Listen!"

I heard the sound of a motor. The sound grew louder.

"This is probably another Army vehicle," Raffles said.

Signalling with his flashlight, he stepped out into the middle of the road. Powerful headlamps penetrated the fog. A limousine, chauffeur-driven, pulled up sharply. A domelight came on in the tonneau, the window was lowered, and a hatless head appeared. Looking out, and seeing that we were in khaki, the passenger demanded, "What's this—a road check?" He sounded American, and by the look of the fur coat he was wearing and the fragrance of the cigar he was smoking, he was a civilian of considerable importance. He added, "Hurry it up. I've got to get on to Cherbourg."

"In that case, sir," said Raffles, moving round to look in at the window, "you'll shortly be passing through Flers. I don't think it's far on. I'd be grateful if you'd drop off my lieutenant there."

"Surely," said the American. He opened the tonneau door. "Get in, Lieutenant."

"You'll get to Flers quicker this way, Bunny," Raffles said. "In you get!"

As I went off in the American's limousine, I thought that probably he was a member of the Diplomatic Corps, and involved with the Versailles Treaty preliminaries, he was on his way to embark at Cherbourg for consultations at the White House in Washington,

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D.C. But no. Cordially enough, he introduced himself as Alexander Woollcott, a correspondent on the staff of the American Expeditionary Force journal, *Stars and Stripes*.

"Published in Paris," he said. "I'm on my way to Cherbourg to report on the embarkation of the first A.E.F. contingent to be going home. What with this fog, I've got a nasty hunch I'll find that the troopship's weighed anchor and gone."

I was glad to be able to set his mind at rest.

"As it happens," I told him, "I saw your A.E.F. chaps on the train from Paris to-day. They're probably still quite a way from Cherbourg. They're on a very slow train."

Reassured, the correspondent told me that he had started late from Paris, owing to the difficulty in getting a car.

"With all these parties going on, celebrating the Armistice," he said, "transport's at a premium. I had to bribe the U.S. Motor Pool sergeant in Paris to let *Stars and Stripes* have this limousine for just this one journey to Cherbourg and back. The car had been requisitioned, along with its French civilian chauffeur, for use by Colonel House, a brass hat very big politically. He's on his way from Washington, but he's not expected in Paris till late to-morrow."

I could have told the correspondent that Colonel House would need his limousine the day after to-morrow to take him to an important luncheon engagement in the forest near Versailles. But I said nothing. Security was involved here.

"I've got to get the car back to the Pool not later than four p.m. to-morrow," said the correspondent, "or that crook of a Transport Sergeant is liable to find himself in the brig."

"This is a very fine car, Mr. Woollcott," I said.

"It was probably requisitioned from some war profiteer," said the correspondent. "He'd left his fur coat in the car, and it's just the coat for a night like this."

A well-informed man, the correspondent was rich in A.E.F. anecdotes and remarkably up-to-date on the subject of the New York theatre. He predicted that Broadway was on the eve of being revitalized by the dazzling talent of new dramatists returning from the war.

"Some of them probably embarking right now," he said, "at Cherbourg."

Fascinating as I found the correspondent, I was anxious to return to Raffles with alternative transport for Operation Champagne, and Flers was further on than we had thought. I was relieved when at

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last the limousine reached Flers and I saw, in the glow of the limousine's headlamps, a solitary pump. It marked a garage of sorts, and I asked the correspondent to drop me off here.

The garage doors were shut, but a window above them showed a dim light in the fog. I shouted up at the window. There was no response.

"Lieutenant," said the correspondent, putting on his hat and getting out of the limousine, "there's a bell hanging there by the pump."

Agitating the bell-clapper by its dangling cord, he produced a clangour that must have been heard all over this fogbound little French town. He did it again. The din seemed to inspire him.

"Hey," he said, "this gives me a title—The Town Crier. How about that for a gossip column—or maybe for radio, the coming thing now the war's over."

"Great title, Mr. Woollcott," I said.

"A natural," he said, and clanged again with evident enthusiasm.

Suddenly the lighted window over the garage doors was flung up and a man leaned out, yelling, "*Fermé! Fermé! Pas de l'essence!*"

"Do you happen to have a van for hire?" I called up to him.

"Van?" he shouted. "Every motor van in Flers has been jacked up for years. No tyres. *Allez vous en!*"

The window banged shut.

Reluctant as any old-time Town Crier to leave off ringing, the correspondent gave the bell one more resounding clang.

"Well, Lieutenant," he said to me regretfully, "I'd have liked to see you squared away, but meantime the A.E.F.'s embarking at Cherbourg, so I can't help you any longer." About to get back into the limousine he paused abruptly, a foot on the running-board. "I think I hear a truck coming!"

The approaching vehicle certainly sounded like a big one, but what came rattling to a standstill, with a rasp of the hand-brake, was the diminutive coupé belonging to Gouvion Frères. Raffles stepped out. He looked at me inquiringly. I shook my head.

"No luck," I told him, "and not much prospect of any."

"This gentleman?" said Raffles.

"Mr. Alexander Woollcott," I said. "He's on the way to report on the A.E.F. contingent's embarkation. He's on the staff of *Stars and Stripes*."

"An Army journal," said Raffles.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the correspondent, "I must be getting along."

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"Just a moment, Mr. Woollcott," Raffles said. "Almost as soon as you'd driven off in your limousine, kindly taking my lieutenant along, an impression came to me—an impression that, when I spoke to you through your car window, there'd been a hat on the seat. Your much more conspicuous fur coat made my belated impression that the hat I'd unconsciously seen was a U.S. Army hat, with chin-strap, seem rather improbable. Still, I thought it as well, just in case my lieutenant should have had no luck on his errand, to see if I could overtake you. You're now wearing your hat, and my original impression of it is confirmed, I see now, by your regulation U.S. Army boots and leggings. That fur coat conceals both your uniform and your rank."

"I'm a private," said the correspondent, bewildered, "but—"

"It's nothing to do with me what you wear," Raffles said, with a smile. "The point is this—I'm going to have to do a swap with you."

"This coat for yours?" said the mystified correspondent.

"No," Raffles said. "Your car for ours."

"With respect, Major," exclaimed the correspondent, aghast, "you can't *do* that!"

"With no less respect," Raffles said, "I must tell you that I can. Let me explain. I'm under orders to deliver an important freight to a specified map reference at a stated hour. The trailer containing the freight has been crippled by a mishap. The coupé we've been using to tow the trailer hasn't enough space in it to carry the freight, but your limousine has, so I'm obliged to requisition it."

"It's already been requisitioned," protested the correspondent. "It ranks, temporarily, as a U.S. Army vehicle on charge to our Motor Pool in Paris. If you seize this—"

"Seize?" Raffles said. "Exchange is no seizure, soldier. I'm leaving you this coupé. Here, you'd better take a look at this Order of Mission. It's issued by Allied Supreme Headquarters on the authority of Marshal Foch, Generalissimo, Allied Armies."

Raffles handed the Order to the correspondent who, his expression bemused, read the document in the light of the limousine's headlamps.

"Now that you understand the position," Raffles said, taking back the Order and pocketing it, "let's waste no more time. The coupé will get you to Cherbourg, given reasonable luck, and you're probably as anxious to be on your way as we are to be on ours."

Turning to the civilian chauffeur, who had been listening while rolling a cigarette, Raffles told him in French to get out of the

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limousine and into the coupé. He obeyed, with a shrug, and Raffles and I got into the limousine. Raffles took the wheel, pressed the self-starter.

Above the rich purring of the motor Raffles said to the fur-coated correspondent, who was standing nonplussed, "I'm sincerely sorry about this, but we're all three of us similarly placed. We're the pawns of High Command."

As we drove off in the fog a sudden clamour broke out behind us. It was the furious clanging, urgent as a fire alarm, of the garage bell.

"What good does Woollcott think he's doing," Raffles said, "by kicking up that row?"

"He's probably doing it in a tantrum of frustration, rage, and panic," I said, "and I fully sympathize with him. I happen to know that if this limousine isn't back in the U.S. Motor Pool in Paris by four p.m. to-morrow, Woollcott could be in trouble."

"We don't want that," said Raffles. "What we'll do, Bunny, when we've delivered the freight to the Château Rémy-Latour, is drive on into Paris and turn in this car to the Motor Pool."

"Good idea," I said, relieved. "That'll keep Woollcott in the clear. He's an interesting chap—an able journalist, very quick in the uptake. The first time he rang that bell, it gave him a notion for a witty sort of news-and-comment project. He plans to call it The Town Crier."

"Then it's lucky I spotted that A.E.F. hat of his," Raffles said, "before he'd thought of changing it for a tricorne of Rip Van Winkle's time."

The clanging of the bell in the fog died away behind us.

The limousine originally requisitioned for the use of Colonel House, the enigmatic politico on his way from Washington, purred along at a better speed than had been possible in the rattletrap coupé. The limousine's headlamps were superior to those of the coupé and, as we went on and on in the fog without seeing the trailer, I began to be puzzled. So did Raffles.

"Where we left the trailer," he said, "there was a dip in the road. I could have sworn we just passed that dip. I remember there was a heap of gravel there at the roadside. I think we'll take another look."

Steering with the road-edge for guide, he backed the limousine for fifty yards or so down to the dip in the road—and abruptly applied the brakes.

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"There it is," he said. "No wonder we didn't see it!"

The trailer's position had changed. It no longer was standing lopsidedly on the grassy road-marge. With its one remaining wheel barely visible in the glow of the limousine's headlamps, the trailer lay on its side in the deep ditch beyond the marge.

We got quickly out of the limousine, and our flashlights showed us at once what had happened.

The trailer had been looted. Its canvas cover had been ripped off. The twelve cases of champagne were gone.

My heart thumped like a drum. I stood rooted, incredulous, shining my flashlight down onto the trailer, capsized and empty, its cover lying in the ditchwater.

"The damned thieves," I heard Raffles say. "There was more than one of them. Look at this!"

I shone my flashlight down on to the muddy grass he was examining.

"Tracks!" I exclaimed.

"As plain as a pikestaff," said Raffles. "Bootmarks, cartwheel tracks, a horse's hoofprints. The thieves spotted the trailer, emptied it, and shoved it into the ditch for concealment. Come on, we've only to follow the tracks!"

We got back into the limousine. Raffles turned it. The headlamps clearly showed the cartwheel tracks in the muddy *pavé* of the road. Driving slowly, we followed the tracks for almost two kilometers, then they turned to the right, through a decrepit gateway standing open. The tracks led us on up a rutted and puddled drive, and Raffles halted the limousine as its headlamps, diluting the fog, revealed the cart that had made the tracks. It was a farm tumbril, tilted down on its shafts, the horse gone from it. Dimly visible beyond was a long low farmhouse with a roof of sodden thatch.

"Have your gun handy," Raffles whispered, as we got out of the limousine.

Squelching through farmyard slush, we approached the house cautiously. To the left of its door was a pungent midden, to the right a dimlit window. From within sounded a rumble of voices. Stealthily Raffles lifted the crude door-latch, pressed slightly on the door. It was unlocked. He flung it open. Revolvers in hand, we charged in—upon a scene of rustic debauchery.

We were in a kitchen. Three hulking peasants, sprawled on chairs

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around a table littered with the remains of some insanitary repast, were in the act of guzzling champagne from magnums.

"*A votre santé, messieurs*," said Raffles.

They stared at us with their jaws agape. A poker dropped with a clatter from the hand of a brawny woman surprised in the act of tending a turf fire smouldering sullenly in the chimney place. On the uneven flagstones of the kitchen floor the stolen champagne cases were stacked. One of them had been broken into. Straw sleeves from pilfered magnums were scattered around on the flagstones, where one magnum lay smashed and a pointer dog speckled with fleas was lapping up a puddle of the spilled champagne.

The brawny woman, wringing her hands in her sleazy pinafore, her feet in wooden *sabots* and her scanty hair done up in twists of newspaper, wailed at us that her sons had found the wine when returning late from the village.

"We are honest people, messieurs," she assured us. "The Inspector will vouch for us. I was just about to call the police on the Inspector's telephone and inform them of the find."

"Were you indeed?" Raffles said.

He was watching the dog with a curious intensity.

"I swear it, m'sieu," insisted the woman, as the dog slunk off, an occasional lurch in its gait, to some sacking in a corner. "Admittedly, my sons should not have opened one of the cases, but—*que voulez vous?*" Her shrug proclaimed a mother's helplessness. "They had been at the *estaminet*, celebrating the Armistice, and their minds were befuddled as to right and wrong."

With a sign of alcoholic repletion the dog sank down voluptuously on the sacking in the corner. Raffles looked from the dog to the three thieves around the table. They simpered at him ingratiatingly, conscious of their guilt. They did not look too intelligent.

"Pardon," Raffles said, politely relieving one of the guzzlers of his magnum and turning it upside down. It was empty. "*C'est bon, le vin?*" Raffles asked, with a smile.

The uncouth clowns smirked and nodded, their heads seeming loose on their necks. They were obviously feeling the effects of their potations.

"Bunny," Raffles said, looking thoughtfully at the three sots, "keep an eye on these gentry. Madame, where's the telephone you were about to call the police on?"

"In my parlour, m'sieu. The provincial Inspector for the Agricul-

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ture Ministry had the telephone put in for use on his rounds. Inspectors must communicate, is it not so?"

"Lead me to it, madame," said Raffles.

Left alone with the three inebriates, I kept a wary eye on them. They sat gazing at me stupidly, but they ventured no comment except for occasional belchings, which seemed to make the champagne fumes more potent in their addled heads. Their condition visibly deteriorated. They swayed in their chairs. One of them fell off, overturning his chair, and lay with his legs outstretched. His brothers peered down at him, then blinked accusingly at my revolver, as though I had shot the miserable clod with it.

Their mother returned, her *sabots* clonking on the flagstones.

"*Tiens*," she exclaimed, disgusted, "what a drunken spectacle!! M'sieu, I am saddened that my sons should make such an exhibition of themselves. They are not used to champagne. *C'est l'Armistice que fait mal!*"

She went on gabbling excuses for her sons' lapse from virtue, and I was relieved when Raffles came back. He stooped over the fallen yokel, twitched his eyelid back, felt his pulse, then looked at the chap's hapless brothers.

"Spiflicated," Raffles said, "to put it mildly." He shrugged. "Come on, Bunny, we shall have to load the freight into the limousine ourselves."

The brawny mother of sons insisted on helping us, and we carried the eleven intact champagne-cases out to the limousine and stacked them in the tonneau. We took our seats in front, and driving off down the farm track, got once more onto the *route nationale*, bound for Versailles.

There was no diminution of the fog, and I was beginning to wonder about the champagne. It had had a good deal more movement than we had bargained for, and I wondered if, by the time we delivered it to the major-domo anxiously awaiting it at the Château Rèmy-Latour, the wine would have recovered sufficiently from its journey to be at its best for drinking at the luncheon the day after. I asked Raffles what he thought.

"I'm wondering myself, Bunny," he said. "That's what I telephoned about." Concentrated on his driving, he added, "Keep your eyes open ahead."

A thought occurred to me. I used my flashlight for a brief glance at my wrist watch. It was long past midnight, so the date was not now the 13th. I did not mention this to Raffles, who had no super-

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stitions that I ever noticed, but personally I felt that we were now out of the woods and our luck would change for the better. I was therefore dismayed when, the limousine having purred along smoothly for heaven knew how many kilometers, I saw in the fog ahead three stationary red lights spaced across the road, barring our way.

"Oh, dear God," I said, "what now?"

Raffles brought the limousine purring to a halt. Near the middle one of the three red lanterns that obstructed the road stood a caped gendarme. On the grassy road-marge three bicycles stood propped against each other, and two more gendarmes approached the limousine, one of them on Raffles' side, one on mine. They shone their flashlights in at us, then onto the wooden cases stacked in the tonneau, then onto us again—and my heart skipped a beat at the menace of the gendarmes' revolvers.

"We've had a long cold wait for you," said the gendarme on Raffles' side sardonically. "Switch off your motor and get out of that car with your hands up."

"Now, just a moment, officer," Raffles said. "As you see, we're in uniform. We're on an official journey—as you will further see from this Order of Mission issued on the authority of—"

"Of Marshal Foch, no less," said the gendarme. "That accords with the warning telephoned to our station. You are in possession of an automobile stolen from a member of the American Expeditionary Force!"

"The Town Crier," Raffles murmured. "Your friend's been ringing bells again, Bunny—telephone type—to broadcast his news."

"You are wearing stolen uniforms, carrying a forged Order of Mission," rasped the gendarme, "and are heading for Paris with freight of some kind for the black market!"

"Well, well," said Raffles. "So he's broadcast not only his news but his comments on it."

"Get out of that car instantly," ordered the gendarme, "or you'll be shot for resisting arrest!"

"Force majeure, Bunny," Raffles said, with a sigh.

He made as though to switch off the purring motor. Instead, he let in the clutch, and with the limousine roaring in low gear, swerved it, bouncing, onto the road-marge. The three bicycles were knocked flying and the limousine crunched over them with a jolt that flung me forward in my seat. My head met the windshield with a mighty impact. I saw a brief brilliant galaxy of stars, then nothing more.

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A certain famous statue of the Emperor Napoleon, regal in robes of bronze, a chaplet of bronze laurel leaves crowning his brow, stands on top of a tall pillar. Recognizing the statue, at which I found myself looking up through a shattered windshield, in wintry daylight, I realized gradually where I was.

"Paris," I heard myself say, my tongue feeling swollen, as though inadvertently I had bitten it. "Place Vendôme—"

"We've just this minute arrived at the Ritz," said Raffles' voice. "It's about nine a.m."

I became aware that I was semi-recumbent in the front seat of what, I recalled, was the limousine we had requisitioned for Operation Champagne.

Raffles, at the wheel of the stationary limousine, was looking at me anxiously.

"You need a shave," I said.

"You should see yourself," he said, relief in his smile. "You have three stitches in your scalp and you've a beautiful black eye. Otherwise, you seem all right. But you'd better stay where you are. Don't worry about a thing. I've delivered the champagne, and I'm just going to pop into the Ritz and report to Colonel Lees-Garland. Just stay where you are and take it easy."

"No," I said. "I want to hear if I've missed much. I'm coming in with you. I feel fine."

I did not, actually. My head ached, and when I sat up to put my cap on, I found that it was too small, my head having been bandaged. All the same, I got out of the limousine, straightened my tunic and Sam Browne belt, to make myself as presentable as possible, and my legs feeling a trifle shaky, accompanied Raffles into the Ritz. The reception-desk attendants eyed me rather oddly, but a pageboy was summoned to conduct us up to the Colonel's suite, where we found him at breakfast.

"Good God, Manders," he rising at the sight of me, "I thought the bloody war was over!"

He poured coffee for us, putting a particularly good dollop of brandy into mine, and he said, "Well now, Raffles, I got your telephone call from that farmhouse place. It was then about one fifteen a.m. You explained to me about your exchange of cars with the *Stars and Stripes* correspondent, but I'd like to know exactly what prompted the request you made to me when you telephoned me from the farmhouse."

"It was the orgy we found in progress there, Colonel," Raffles said.

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"Those simpletons at the farm were guzzling that champagne, found by chance at the roadside, with no more knowledge of it than a kid who accepts goodies from a stranger, or a dog that picks up stray bones. They could have been poisoned. It was a fleeting thought, Colonel, but it brought me a sudden memory of something you'd told us. You said that the Cellarer at St. Lô. had been *many years* with Gouvion Frères. But, Colonel, that was impossible! The man we talked to at the Priory hadn't a grey hair on his head or a line in his face. He was a *young* man—under thirty, I'd say. So I telephoned to you and asked you to get through on the phone to the Police Chief at St. Lô and request him to confirm that the man we'd talked to at the Priory was, in fact, Monsieur Yvonnec, the Cellarer."

"I got through to the Police Chief," said Colonel Lees-Garland. "He called me back at four a.m. He'd been to the Priory with two of his men. They got no reply to their knocking. They forced an entrance and searched the place. They found Monsieur Yvonnec and his Wine Porter. They'd been shot and thrown into the deepest of the cellars. Monsieur Yvonnec's still alive, is in hospital, and will recover. He says that the seizure of the Priory by the two men you saw occurred on the eleventh, the very day the Armistice was signed. Undoubtedly those two men were enemy agents."

"Diehards," said Raffles, "refusing to accept the stark fact of defeat—"

"And determined to strike a final blow—a low blow *after* the bell had rung!" The furrows were deep in the Colonel's face. "God help me," he said bitterly, "it was *I* who gave that bogus Cellarer exactly the chance he was waiting for. He's in the wine trade. Monsieur Yvonnec recognized him as a young salesman of Rhenish wines and French champagnes who came into Gouvion Frères' place at Rheims, just before the war, and offered to represent them in England. He didn't get the job. But of course, being in the trade, he knew just where the great champagne firms had emergency cellars. He knew he had only to wait and that special *cuvée* wine would be required—for some quite exceptional Armistice occasion. And it was *I* who gave him the order, and told him it would be collected by two of my men of *officer* rank, thus emphasizing the importance *and* the secrecy of the occasion."

"He was certainly curious to know exactly where his wine was going," Raffles said. "Eh, Bunny?"

"Absolutely, Raffles," I said, my bandaged head throbbing.

"But what I don't understand," the Colonel said to Raffles, "are

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your actions subsequent to your telephone call to me at one fifteen a.m. from the farmhouse."

"We continued our journey, sir," Raffles said. "I was worried. Those chaps at the farmhouse hadn't been poisoned. Neither had their dog. They were merely drunk. But another possibility gnawed at me. What if one or more of those eleven remaining champagne cases had been booby-trapped—Russian-roulette style—to explode on opening?"

I almost dropped my cup. I stared at Raffles.

He said, "We had a little trouble, evading a road check by gendarmes, but that was incidental, Colonel. The important thing was that I thought it inadvisable to deliver the suspect champagne consignment to the major-domo at the Château Rèmy-Latour. I brought the consignment straight on, through Versailles, into Paris, and delivered the eleven cases to the Duty Officer at Allied Supreme Headquarters."

"I know you did," Colonel Lees-Garland said grimly. "I had a call, an hour or so ago, from General De Sauvagnac. He told me that you explained the position to the Night Duty Officer and instructed him—on the authority of your high-level Order of Mission—to have the eleven cases taken immediately to the nearest ballistics testing-range, have the cases set out in a row, and have them machine-gunned."

I listened, open-mouthed, my heart hammering.

"I hope I did right, Colonel?" Raffles said.

"Absolutely right," said the Colonel, "and General De Sauvagnac agrees. In your place, we'd have done the same thing. The fact remains—there was *no* explosion when the champagne cases were machine-gunned."

"No explosion, sir?" Raffles' keen face was a study in consternation. Never had I seen him so taken aback.

"I don't know what to make of it," said the Colonel. "But there it is—what's done is done. The magnums have been riddled with machine-gun bullets, shot to smithereens, and the wine's sunk into the ground. I shall have a big squawk from Section O's Paymaster when I show him Gouvion Frères' bill for a gross of magnums of their finest *cuvée* champagne. He'll yell murder—especially when he hears that the luncheon's been cancelled."

"Cancelled, sir?" Raffles said.

"So General De Sauvagnac told me on the phone this morning. The luncheon was arranged in haste. King George is in France, all

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right—he's at Sir Douglas Haig's headquarters at St. Omer. But some Allied statesmen might not arrive in time for the luncheon—Colonel House, for instance, who's believed to be bringing from Washington, for discussion, a draft of Fourteen Points that President Wilson feels could provide a sound basis for the forthcoming Versailles Peace Treaty. Apparently, on second thoughts, it was decided that if late-arriving statesmen heard that some of their Allied opposite numbers had already conferred privately together, it could give rise to inter-Allied jealousies. Quite enough of those will probably emerge at the formal Peace Conference. Anyway, the luncheon's been cancelled—wisely, in my opinion," the Colonel said.

A knock sounded on the door, and he called, "Come in!"

The newcomer was the pageboy who had brought Raffles and me up to the suite.

"Please, Colonel, sir," the boy said, "there are two Military Policemen down in the foyer. They belong to the U.S. Army Provost Corps. They're inquiring about a limousine that's standing outside. They say its license-plate number was reported to their headquarters and they were ordered to watch out for it. They have been told at the reception-desk that the limousine was brought here by two officers." The boy studiously avoided looking at Raffles and me. "The M.P.s want to speak to the two officers, Colonel, sir."

"Tell the M.P.s to wait just a minute, Jean-Claude," said the Colonel, frowning at us as the boy went out. "What's this, then?"

Raffles smiled ruefully. "The *Stars and Stripes* correspondent, Colonel—our friend The Town Crier. He's still ringing bells, telephone bells, possibly from as far away as Cherbourg. Either because he genuinely believes Manders and I are crooks, or because he's trying to alibi himself and the Motor Pool sergeant if the limousine's not back in the Pool by four p.m. today, he's broadcasting the news far and wide that the car was stolen from him."

"Exchange is no robbery," said the Colonel.

"I explained that to him, sir," Raffles said, "but he doesn't seem to have been convinced. This is just one of those inter-Allied misunderstandings. Don't you think, Colonel, that you'd better have a word with these M.P.s yourself? You know just how much or how little they should be told about Operation Champagne. You could ask them to return the limousine to the Motor Pool, and you could show them this Order of Mission—which should put everything right."

"Except that the bogus Cellarer hasn't been caught," the Colonel

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said grimly, "and with all this war aftermath movement of displaced persons and prisoners of war, across international frontiers, he's very unlikely to be caught. I'm still wondering just what the devil he had up his sleeve."

The Colonel stood up.

"I suppose I'd better have a word with these M.P.s," he said. "You fellows will lunch with me here at the Ritz, then catch the night train back to London and report to your Army depot, in Buckingham Palace Road, for early demobilization."

Colonel Godfrey Lees-Garland left us, and Raffles looked at me with concern.

"That shiner of yours is swelling a bit, Bunny," he said. "We'll see if the Ritz kitchen has a raw beefsteak handy. I had the medical orderly at Supreme Headquarters stitch and bandage your scalp wound while I was arranging with the Night Duty Officer to have the champagne machine-gunned. How're you feeling now?"

"Mystified," I said, "and it's making my headache worse. Raffles, if the champagne consignment was neither poisoned nor booby-trapped with explosives, what was the bogus Cellarer's object?"

"That's a good question, Bunny," Raffles said. "The fact is that when we reached Paris, with you unconscious in the seat beside me, I made a call before going to Supreme Headquarters. I visited that crooked wine merchant we've had dealings with before, remember? He was in bed, but I got him up. I asked him if he had any Gouvion Frères champagne in stock. He told me he had sixteen cases of one of their less expensive champagnes. I offered to take eleven cases of it off his hands, in exchange for eleven cases of Gouvion's finest *cuvée* wine—provided he paid me the difference in the value of the two wines."

Raffles took a thick sheaf of Banque de France thousand-franc notes from his tunic pocket.

"These should help cure your headache, Bunny," he said. "It's all very simple. There's a saying that 'circumstances alter cases'—so I altered the cases to suit the circumstances, then went directly to Supreme Headquarters and delivered the consignment."

I was so shocked that, for a moment, I forgot my black eye and my headache.

"But that wine merchant," I faltered, "if those cases we hauled from St. Lô *are* booby-trapped—"

"I've no doubt some of them are," said Raffles. "But he's been warned. He received an anonymous telephone call shortly after he'd

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done his deal. Some excited-sounding person seemed to know of it, and warned him, if he valued his life, not to play Russian roulette by opening those cases, but to cart them out of Paris and drop them, intact, into a deep place in the Seine. He's a crook, not a hero. We know very well what choice he'll make—and he knows we know too much about him for him to try any crafty reprisal."

Raffles divided the sheaf of banknotes into two equal shares.

"So you see, Bunny, now that the war's over, we can return with clear consciences to our civilian way of life—as gentlemen," said A. J. Raffles pleasantly, "of independent means."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In connection with the Manders narrative, found recently among his long-hidden records of criminal adventure in peace and war, it may possibly be of interest to remark that the physical appearance of the bogus Cellarer at St. Lô, as described by Manders, bears some resemblance to that of an individual who later achieved world-wide notoriety.

Should the resemblance be more than merely coincidental, which unfortunately cannot at this late date be proved one way or the other, it is a very great pity that the individual in question was not apprehended while clandestinely active in France during World War One.

For this arrogant, ambitious man subsequently became a prominent Nazi, was appointed Foreign Minister by Adolf Hitler, significantly assisted in destroying the well-meaning efforts of the eminent treaty makers of Versailles, and with consummate skill manipulated a foreign policy that inevitably resulted in World War Two.

Born in the Rhineland in 1893, the individual in question was hanged at Nuremburg in 1946.

So ended the ex-champagne salesman, Joachim Von Ribbentrop.

"Q"

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I TOO HAVE A LITTLE LIST

(With apologies to W. S. Gilbert)

by ANNE BRAUDE

If someday it should happen that a victim should be found,
I've got a little list, I've got a little list
Of a motley crew of suspects who just chanced to be around
At the moment he was missed, the moment he was missed:
There's the ne'er-do-well young nephew in debt up to his ears,
The blonde and lovely widow weeping crocodilian tears,
The corpse's business partner with the small and shifty eyes,
The butler, who's been telling those unnecessary lies,
The daughter, who is alibied by her psychiatrist,
Let none of 'em be missed, let none of 'em be missed!

There's the doctor, who's not sure just what was in that little pill.
(On an autopsy insist, because he's on the list.)
And the cousins in the corner planning to contest the will,
They never should be missed, they never should be missed!
The lawyer, who's been hovering close by the widow's side,
Is believed to cherish hopes that she'll soon be his blushing bride;
And that handsome fellow yonder who is married to the niece—
Back home in Pennsylvania he is known to the police—
And because he is least likely, let's include the pharmacist,
For why should he be missed, for why should he be missed?

And the author of the blackmail note found beneath the chair—
No detective novelist would leave him off the list!
And the innocent young ward who has turned out to be the heir,
We'll see that she's not missed, we'll see that she's not missed!
Inspector Jones is baffled and in desperation turns
To a wealthy young collector of Greek funerary urns,
The Amateur Detective, who examines all the clues
And proves the doctor guilty by the color of his shoes
(He wrote the blackmail letter, but the victim did resist)—
Though his guilt we had dismissed, his guilt we had dismissed!
We had put him on the list, we had put him on the list,
But his guilt we had dismissed, but his guilt we had dismissed!

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

STOCKHOLM WINNERS: At the Crime Writers Third International Congress in Stockholm last June, the Swedish Academy of Detection presented a number of awards of interest to American and British readers. Winner for the best translated novel published in Sweden last year was Ruth Rendell's *Make Death Love Me*. Three Grand Master Awards were also presented, to Dorothy B. Hughes, Christianna Brand, and Hillary Waugh. And Frederic Dannay personally received the Grand Master Award presented to Ellery Queen by the Academy several years ago.

On the same evening winners were announced in the Congress Short Story Contest, open to mystery writers around the world. Some 275 entries were received, from more than thirty countries. Winner of the first prize, a Saab automobile, was Frank Sisk for his story "A Visit with Montezuma." Second prize went to Dwight Steward for "Genesis," and Tony Hillerman won third prize with "The Witch, Yazzie, and the Nine of Clubs." Fifteen runner-up prizes went to Alida Baxter, Stanley Cohen, Arthur Douglas, Madelaine Duke, Michael Gilbert, Richard Grindal, Edward D. Hoch, Grace Hogarth, Francis King, Michael Z. Lewin, John Stevenson, Lawrence Treat, Jaroslav Veis, Thomasina Weber, and Janwillem van de Wetering.

Though the contest was truly international, and authors' identities were concealed from the judges, it's interesting to note that the eighteen winners comprised nine stories from America, eight from Britain, and one from Czechoslovakia. All eighteen will be published early next year by Collins Crime Club, London, in an anthology tentatively titled *The World's Best Crime Stories*, with American publication to follow.

MONTHLY MURDERS: Here's further information about Michael L. Cook's *Monthly Murders*, a mammoth index to 110 American and British digest-size mystery magazines published during the past forty years. The book will contain 1,141 pages plus an Introduction, and will index more than 31,000 stories from *EQMM, AHMM, Mike Shayne, The Saint, Manhunt, Verdict*, and all the rest. British editions are included when their contents differed from the American editions. Greenwood Press

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will publish *Monthly Murders* early next year, and Cook is already at work on his next project—*Fan Fare*, an index to some forty fan and semi-professional magazines in the mystery, pulp, dime-novel, and book-collecting fields.

CANADIAN MAGAZINE: A new Canadian mystery magazine, the first to my knowledge, has been launched in Toronto. Planned as a bimonthly, *Black Cat Mystery Magazine* is priced at $1.75 an issue and has a handsome black-and-white cover, giving it the appearance of a literary magazine. The first issue used mainly reprints, by Poe, Doyle, and Ambrose Bierce, but there were a few new things too, including the beginning of a three-part serial set in Toronto. Future issues promise more new stories. Subscription is $8.00 for six issues, from March Chase Publishing, 45 Southport Street, Suite 712, Toronto, Canada M6S 3N5.

MYSTERY LEADER: New York City can now boast of its third mystery bookshop, more than in any other city, with the opening of Foul Play in Greenwich Village this summer.

It joins Murder Ink and The Mysterious Bookshop in offering New Yorkers and visitors a wide range of deadly delights.

REVIVAL: Since the best-selling success of Martin Cruz Smith's *Gorky Park*, Jove has announced it will reissue five early mysteries Smith wrote under the pseudonym of Simon Quinn. The books, to be published next April and May, are *The Last Time I Saw Hell, Nuplex Red, His Eminence Death, The Midas Coffin*, and *Last Rites for the Vulture*—all in the Inquisitor series.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Clark Howard, this year's Edgar winner for best short story, is widely known for his fact-crime books, *Zebra* and *Six Against the Rock*. This month Putnam/Marek publishes his latest book, *American Saturday*, an account of George Jackson's death at San Quentin prison.

Gregory Mcdonald's Fletch, too long absent from the mystery scene, returns in *Fletch and the Widow Bradley*, a November paperback from Warner Books. In December, Mcdonald's *The Buck Passes Flynn* will be published by Ballantine Books.

British author Richard Gordon, who published a novel about one famous murderer, *Jack the Ripper*, last year, turns to another one, Dr. Crippen, in *A Question of Guilt*, his November novel from Atheneum.

Ruth Rendell's latest Chief Inspector Wexford novel, published in England as *Put On By Cunning*, has been retitled *Death Notes* for its American publication by Pantheon Books this month.

Joyce Harrington's second novel, *Family Reunion*, will be published by St. Martin's Press in February or March.

Dorothy B. Hughes is writing a history of Los Alamos, New Mexico, and its atomic research center.

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"Q"

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Who could resist a film heralding itself as "a musical mystery movie" which combines the talents of sublime Diana Rigg—the unforgettable Emma Peel of the classic *Avengers* television series—and the delectable Miss Piggy! *The Great Muppet Caper* may not be exactly crime *noir*, but it *is* about (as the opening song promises) "mystery and catastrophe, cops and crooks," involves us in a string of daring jewel robberies, and is a caper film to amuse and brighten the spirit.

It is not the first time, actually, that the Muppets have enthusiastically invaded our genre. Last year an episode of their long-running television show paid homage to the golden age of the mystery film in "The Muppet Murders": Kermit the Frog in Sam Spade's trenchcoat joining Liza Minnelli (dressed exactly like Claire Trevor in *Murder My Sweet*) in tracking down the killer knifing puppet performers backstage in a theatrical setting—with understudy Miss Piggy as prime suspect! That surprisingly murderous episode won a Raven from Mystery Writers of America.

Now, however, the crimes are jewelry heists. Investigative reporter Kermit (in regulation shabby raincoat and crushed hat) misses the scoop of his life when he and friends Fozzie and Gonzo concentrate on a human interest photo-story of a chicken crossing a busy New York street, unaware that directly behind them masked bandits have snatched a diamond necklace from Lady Holiday, the elegant London fashion designer. "You're fired!" barks their editor, so the crestfallen trio stow away on a plane to London to interview Lady Holiday, track down the jewel thieves, and win back their jobs.

All is not well, however, at the Holiday Fashion House. The flamboyant owner's irresponsible, spendthrift brother Nicky (Charles Grodin) —whose ties always seem to be crooked—is scheming with three of the top models to rob his sister of more of her gems, especially the priceless Baseball Diamond. During a blackout at a nightclub another robbery occurs, and Miss Piggy—an aspiring Holiday model—is under suspicion: "We've got to plant the goods on her to get the heat off us," Grodin mutters to his cohorts, but reluctantly, for he has quite lost his heart to the pig. Kermit has also, and tries to come to her rescue—"We've got to catch these thieves redhanded!" ("What color are their hands now?" asks Gonzo, puzzled.)

Miss Piggy is arrested, and her dour H. M. Prison scenes—plus her daring escape—are the equal of anything you've seen on *Prisoner, Cell Block H*. All ends happily, though, as a gallery heist is foiled and Kermit gets his story (plus pig). In the movies' more innocent days, the comedy mystery for family audiences was a tradition. This species, long absent from the screen, seems, like the lost art of narrative puppetry, to be having a Muppets revival.

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No one can write a successful mystery play any more, it is often said, because all the surprises have been used up. There are a few new ones in *The Butler Did It*, a play by Walter Marks and Peter Marks (brothers) which debuted in New York recently. The title—surely among the oldest "surprises" in mystery theater—gives nothing away, for murder here occurs in a family named Butler, a family with manservant as well, so suspects abound. Indeed, we suspect fairly soon—perhaps because three minutes after the curtain rises a character drops dead and an onlooker immediately volunteers to drag her off—that we are being fooled. But we are being *fooled* and fooled, for the twists come tumbling fast in an intriguing mystery (do you know that mistletoe can be quickly ground into a highly efficient poison?) laced with laughter, none of it foolish.

These Marks brothers are no stranger to the mystery theatrical form. A few years back they collaborated on *Encounter with Murder*, a locked-room whodunit about a psychiatrist's group of patients who meet at a deserted Maine lighthouse; Robert Lansing starred in summer stock. Right now they are working on a private-eye musical with an interesting premise: its gumshoe hero sticks unswervingly to the truth while lost in a world of total falsehood.

"We'd like to continue in murder and mayhem," confessed the brothers Marks to EQMN, while fully aware that tricking the audience can be a tricky business indeed. But mystery theater is "an elegant, interesting, fun way of doing murder," and there *is* an audience out there—hopefully an audience which finds mystery plays as addictive as salted peanuts (or ground mistletoe).

In the stylish, devilish *The Butler Did It*, Walter and Peter Marks have done it well.

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INTERVIEW: WILLIAM BANKIER (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: How do you pronounce your surname?

BANKIER: You might think of it as Bank-yer. Rhymes with "thank-yer," sort of. Emphasis on the bank, as in overdraft. I wonder if doing this interview is making me looney.

EQMN: Sports, especially baseball, and amateur theatrics are well represented in your fiction. Are these special enthusiasms of yours?

BANKIER: Yes. I'm a sports watcher—not much of a doer. Baseball grips my soul and I miss it sorely over here. Once I caught a line-drive foul in the stands at Jarry Park. It remains one of the highlights of my

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life. A dream of mine is that in another life I'm a sportswriter assigned to cover the Expos through a whole season. Some kind of paradise.

As far as amateur theatrics, I belong to the Carlton Dramatic Society here in Wimbledon.

EQMN: What kinds of roles are you given?

BANKIER: I'm given a wide range of parts in which my Canadian accent is not always appropriate but they use me because men are scarce in drama groups. My preference is a role where I can rant and rave. I played Parris in Miller's *The Crucible* and loved the chance to let go.

EQMN: You have a gift for the telling detail in your characters and settings, making them unique, vivid, memorable. Are you just generally observant and able to recall these observations when you sit down to write—presuming you sit down to write—or do you make up a good deal of it as you go along? Do you take notes to help you with your writing?

BANKIER: I do a lot of people-watching. More than one story has come out of a stranger who has behaved in a way that starts me imagining. I don't keep a notebook, but I do scribble down ideas on bar mats, serviettes, and flyleaves of paperbacks and toss them behind my typewriter when I get home. There's more material there than I'll ever be able to develop.

EQMN: You seem to know a good deal about cocktail lounges in Montreal and pub life in England. What do you drink when you're people-watching in these places?

BANKIER: I like to sit in bars and pubs. I especially like to get in early—say eleven o'clock, when there are few customers and the place smells of last night. It reminds me of my teenage years as a bellboy in that hotel in Belleville, the place I call Baytown in my stories. I drink lager most of the time. Occasionally red wine. Bourbon is rare here so when I see a bottle of Jack Daniels or Jim Beam I have that. A fond memory is the ramos gin fizzes we drank in New Orleans. And when I used to visit New York City I sat at the bar in the Absinthe House and drank Miller High-Life.

EQMN: In a recent story Professah Harry Lawson says, "I'm in favor of the big argument. We all go silent at the end." Where did that come from?

BANKIER: Much of what my characters say comes from my subconscious. The lines take me by surprise. But of course they must be part of my experience and attitude. The line you quote is, again, an echo of the effect my wife has had on me. I grew up keeping a low profile in a family of eight vociferous people. It took Phyllis years to train me to speak out and get it off my chest.

EQMN: Do you write full time?

BANKIER: Yes. I'm a lucky man. I'm paid for doing what I would do anyway. If I won the pools tomorrow I'd get up the following day and do just about what I'm doing now. Maybe wearing a better suit.

"Q"

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Though the mystery novel was once contemporary in period almost by definition, in recent years some of the finest books in the genre have been set in times other than the present. That the trend continues is shown by the latest novels of two of Britain's finest practitioners of crime fiction. One deals with the relatively recent past and is a mainstream novel as much as it is a mystery; the other takes us back many centuries and is solidly in the tradition of classical detective fiction. They have little in common but their quality in plotting, characterization, and general craftsmanship.

****Peter Dickinson: *A Summer in the Twenties*, Pantheon, $10.95. Tom Hankey, a young member of the privileged upper classes, struggles to choose a side in the summer (1926) of Britain's General Strike. Dickinson's prose is as magical as ever and he makes both the people and the issues of the time come to life. Though the mystery elements are somewhat secondary, they include a band of masked collegian anti-Communists patterned after Bulldog Drummond's "Black Gang," and a whodunit angle in the search for a shadowy and dangerous "Bolshie" leader known only as Ricardo. Railroad buffs will especially enjoy the action sequences.

****Ellis Peters: *Monk's-Hood*, Morrow, $9.95. The third Brother Cadfael novel, concerning the murder by poison of a would-be benefactor of Shrewsbury Abbey, is a gem of a historical whodunit, written, plotted, and peopled with consummate skill. It has the added virtue of insight into a time and background rarely explored in mystery fiction. The material on medieval Welsh and English property law is fascinating.

***John Lutz: *Shadow Man*, Morrow, $10.95. In his best book since the memorable *Bonegrinder*, Lutz poses an irresistible problem: how can a multiple-personality political assassin, known to be locked up in a maximum-security mental institution, be seen on the streets by people who knew him in his various identities? A psychiatrist studying the killer is murdered, and Senator Jerry Anderson investigates. The complicated puzzle culminates in a rousing action finish and a succession of neat twists.

***Michael Shaara: *The Herald*, McGraw-Hill, $10.95. Beginning with the inexplicable death of the whole population of a small Southern city, this science-fictional mystery has the flavor of a Doomsday radio play. Though the Pulitzer-Prizewinning author's message may be controversial, he builds suspense with undeniable skill. Few will not be compelled to read to the end.

***Kelley Roos: *Murder on Martha's Vineyard*, Walker, $9.95. The first Roos novel in ten years becomes a candidate for this department's Comeback-of-the-Year award. The decision to throw mystery to the winds and go for pure suspense will be regretted by some readers, but the tension is well manipulated and

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there are several well drawn characters, including an aging private detective who keeps working because he is not in good enough shape to enjoy retirement.

**Stuart Kaminsky: *High Midnight*, St. Martin's, $9.95. Toby Peters' latest case is not among his best. It starts beautifully but seems to lose its action in the second half. Guest stars this time include Gary Cooper (intriguingly drawn with some well chosen biographical details), Ernest Hemingway (pretty one-dimensional), and Babe Ruth (a walk-on).

**Aaron Marc Stein: *A Body for a Buddy*, Doubleday/Crime Club, $9.95. Matt Erridge is also a bit off form this time, though no novel by Stein is completely without benefits. At his college reunion, Matt investigates the murder of the friendly girl the old grads called Sooey Generous. The author's usual forte in this series is a colorful background, and the lack of one here dilutes the story's impact.

**Robert B. Gillespie: *The Crossword Mystery*, Raven House, $2.25. The author is a crossword puzzle editor, a profession shared by the detective (Rocky Caputo) and the first victim in this novel. A major feature is one of mystery fiction's more elaborate dying messages—shades of Dorothy L. Sayers' "The Fascinating Problem of Uncle Meleager's Will." Fun to read without ever really convincing, this is a promising misfire that leaves me anxious to see Gillespie's next.

Among the reprints is a novel with many of the characteristics of the "big" contemporary crime novel. David Keith Cohler's 1980 debut *Gamemaker* (Signet, $2.50), like many of the type, involves a serial killer. This one kills sports stars and leaves a chess piece at the scene of each crime. Police procedure is described in detail, as are the political ramifications of a major crime investigation. Much life history is provided for many of the characters, including the victims. The solution is reached by a combination of accident and detection.

There are some questionable statements about sports here, but the novel is hugely readable and strongly recommended.

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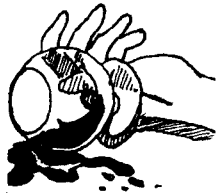

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DETECTIVERSE

THE HISTORY OF MYSTERY

by S. L. VARNADO

The world's best stories all deal with crime,
You can trace it back to the earliest time.
There was Adam and Eve alone in the garden,
They pulled the first heist and got off with a pardon.
There was Cain and Abel—the first homicide,
And Helen of Troy—the first missing bride.
There was Dante, who wrote of the lords and ladies
Whose red hot crimes got them sentenced to Hades.
And William Shakespeare—a real crowd pleaser—
With the mystery of Hamlet, the murder of Caesar.
There was Ali Baba and Jack the Ripper,
Cinderella (The Case of the Missing Slipper),
And Poe and Doyle and Chesterton too
And Ellery Queen, to name just a few.
So count them over and, as they pass,
Tell me the Mystery ain't got class!

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 587th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . about a thirty-year-old treasure . . .

The author, Alan J. Scally, is twenty-eight, a native Oregonian, a first generation American (parents from Scotland), and is presently employed as a warehouseman. His hobbies are "limited to writing . . . poetry in hopelessly obscure local small-press publications, as well as stints as rock critic, theater and movie reviewer." He is married and has "two rambunctious boys". . .

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

by ALAN J. SCALLY

The pickup sits busted in the overgrown front yard, the right-rear tire flat and a little puddle of water in the corner of the truck bed by the driver's side. We have to use Sheila's old jalopy to get into town for groceries and beer. Our two-bedroom mobile home sits on a lot about ten miles out of town, but town is coming closer every year. I could get off my butt and fix the damned truck, but I'm too old and lazy, and besides Sheila brings all the beer I want from town. Everything was going fine until I got this damned letter today. Now I will have to get that truck fixed.

Sheila bartends at Johnny's, a joint about five miles this side of town. She's my daughter. Seven years ago she married a no-account ranch hand name of Monty Fancher. Well, he called himself a ranch hand but mostly he used his hand to reach for a glass of whiskey. Until he took off one fine day, which was okay by me. So now it's just Sheila and me—Old Bob O'Rourke, the cowboy who turned bank robber when things went sour back in the late '40's.

My ex-wife Marge (God rest her soul) had a hell of a taste for what passed for high living on the rodeo circuit in those days; but after I'd busted my leg for the third or fourth time, I was washed up high

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and dry at the ripe old age of 28 back in 1947, with no more prize money coming in, a newly pregnant wife (and none too happy about it neither), and a mighty thirst for Kentucky whiskey to help me forget all that was going on.

Now, a bar on Larimer Street in Denver in 1947 might not have seemed like the start of much, especially if you'd eyeballed the gimpy-legged cowboy alone at a table telling his troubles to a glass of bourbon. But Big Nick walked in and sure as hell saw something. Big Nick hung around the outskirts of the rodeo. He asked the right questions at the right time, said the right things, and always had the bucks to buy a broke cowboy a drink or three.

On this day in Denver he sat himself down and ordered a soda pop, then talked to me for a while, we discussed this and that, how hard it was to go from the rodeo to anything else, and he seemed to have seen a lot of my better rides.

Now you can blame it on Jack Daniels or Jim Beam or anybody else, but I began listening when he talked about all the money sitting in small tank-town banks, and how all you needed was a fast car, a gun, and enough guts to pull it off. So it wound up I agreed to accompany him on a "business trip" up north—at least, that's what we told Marge.

I sure had some misgivings about the whole project, sitting in that crummy hotel room with a hangover the next morning. And Marge wasn't exactly thrilled either, sitting all pouty-faced and upset in a faded robe in a cheap hotel room just off Larimer Street. But then Big Nick came in all sunshine and cigars and dropped a century note in her lap, lighting her eyes up like a pinball machine giving away a free game. I leaned over and kissed her.

"I'll be back in a few days, honey."

"That's okay—take your time, sweetheart." She cooed and preened as she fondled that hundred-dollar bill. She wouldn't care if I never came back, provided I sent her century notes nice and regular. Come to think about it, that might have been a halfway decent idea.

Well, the next few years Big Nick and I became downright good at robbing banks in Colorado, Utah, Eastern Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming. Wherever the town was small and the police just a little behind the eight ball.

But after five or six years the times caught up with us. The police were getting smarter. Their cars were getting faster. And hell, I had a little girl that I wanted to see on Sundays without having to wear a striped suit. So I told Big Nick that this business trip would be

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my last. He didn't raise a fuss—wasn't his style. He was the last of the old-fashioned gentlemen. Now that might seem an odd thing to say about a bank robber, but you never met Big Nick.

We were going to rob the bank in Ontario, Oregon. It's way the hell over east near the Idaho border and the money we would have gotten would just about have bought the gas home with enough left over for a couple of hamburgers on the way. We'd spent the night before toasting the end of our partnership, drinking bourbon in our motel room, getting downright sentimental. So we never had time to case the joint properly. But hell, we'd done it a thousand times before. And with the damned security guard in the restroom we thought we had a piece of cake. The guard came flying out of the restroom without even pulling up his pants, so that he tripped like some circus clown. But not before he drilled Big Nick in the back.

Me? Well, I ran. To the car. Drove that damned car as fast as a tornado across the state line, out of Oregon and out of bank robbing for good. A week of hiding like a scared rabbit with only a jar of peanut butter and some Oreo cookies to eat will cure a body of bank robbing for good. That put an end to my life of crime, but I knew I was lucky.

After the big money stopped coming in, Marge and I got divorced. I never did tell her about the little bit I'd stashed away for when I got old. She never understood planning for a rainy day. She figured when you got wet you got wet.

I worked here and there for a few years, always wondering about Big Nick and always feeling kind of guilty. Finally I settled down here in Eastern Oregon near Prineville with Monty and Sheila a few years back.

Marge passed away in '65, never having forgiven me for not making her a lady. Life is funny, but I ain't done much laughing. It's like Big Nick used to say—we all remember old times that never was, the good old days that were really bad old days.

The letter came today. You could have knocked me over with that feather they're always talking about. It was from Big Nick, the guy I'd left for dead on an Eastern Oregon bank floor in '53.

"Dear Bob . . ." Well, it told how he'd somehow survived and served his twenty years and never been able to get a hold of me. But I'd done a hell of a job covering up my tracks. Finally a private dick located me for Big Nick. The letter was to be mailed only on Nick's death, since he'd been dying even while in prison and was stuck in the charity ward of the local hospital. He'd spent what

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money he had left on him in locating me. There were no kinfolk involved, and no friends except for me who he'd not seen for nigh onto thirty years.

But he told me about the money. $100,000 hid near an abandoned cabin up in the hills of Utah. For his old age. But since Big Nick wasn't going to have any old age . . .

Well, I got all misty-eyed and walked around outside some, thinking how strange it was that a man you run off and leave for dead will look you up after thirty years and give you a gift. And I felt guilty. But I'm going after that money.

The daughter is curious about my sudden interest in getting the truck fixed.

"Going somewhere, Daddy?"

"Yep."

"Where?"

"Tell you when I get back."

That was a few days ago. It took a while to get there but I found it. I never did know where Big Nick took off to when he left for a spell, but here it was, isolated and pretty. He never got to spend his money, what with prison and being so sick, and not knowing where his only friend was, but where I stood at that moment I resolved to honor his memory.

I got the suitcase and the little box, then stood still for a couple of seconds, just thinking about Big Nick. Sort of my own little funeral service. I thought about him in a poor man's grave with no flowers and no tears, and how I was getting closer to the same fix. I swore I was driving straight to where he was buried and giving him some flowers and some tears straight from the heart.

I headed down the hill to my truck. About halfway down I saw him, his four-wheel-drive Bronco pulling up behind my ragged old pickup. Monty Fancher.

I stopped. He had spotted me and was headed up the hill. A 30-06 in his hands. The letter. Damned old fool that I am. Sheila found the letter and called the worthless bum. There was nowhere to run, and how fast can an old man run?

"The money, old man."

"Did Sheila—"

"Yeah, but she ain't seeing any of it."

"You damned—"

"Shut up. Shut up and I'll let you walk away from here. You're gonna have to walk—your truck ain't running too good any more."

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He reached inside my denim jacket and took my .38 from the holster. Damn. So she'd told him about that too. He took the money and turned to go. He wasn't afraid of me.

"You know, Monty—money wasn't the only thing Big Nick left."

"Oh, yeah? Well, what else did he—"

And as he turned to face me, the shot from Big Nick's derringer blew most of his jugular vein away. I was happy then that Big Nick had made me spend all those boring hours practising that one shot. And I was happy he'd left the cleaning kit and ammo wrapped up nice and dry after thirty years.

I hid Monty under some rocks and brush, after removing his keys and wallet. It would be a while before anybody found him. I took the plates and identifying numbers off the pickup and hid them separate.

As I drove away in Monty's Bronco, I could swear I heard Big Nick laughing. And I swore it would be a dozen red roses at least.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

GROWING EVIDENCE

by MARCIA ZEGAR

There once was a gardener named Powell,
Who committed a murder most foul,
When the garden plot failed,
And the culprit was nailed,
He decided to throw in the trowel.

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a *NEW* detective story by

LIONEL BOOKER

Dire doings on a TV stage during rehearsals for a sitcom pilot . . . the great man from the legitimate theater had finally consented to do a TV series, and a successful TV series these days means big money, and if big money comes, can murder be far behind?

THE WHISTLE BLOWER

by LIONEL BOOKER

"Believe me, this series has a great chance to make it," said my agent. "They've got a top star, the format tested well in questionnaires, and it's a Carl Spencer production. What more could you want?"

As a matter of fact, all I wanted was work in a television series. *Any* series. What actor doesn't? It's the closest thing to a steady-paying job in our profession and a chance for instant stardom. Many unknown (and often untalented) performers have risen to become super-stars simply by speaking witless jokes in weekly sitcoms.

Most series start out as a pilot, which is a fully produced opening episode that introduces all the regular characters and gives an indication of what kind of format future episodes will follow. It also gives the network executives a chance to appraise the salability of the idea to the viewers.

What causes a pilot to be made has nothing to do with the originality of the idea, the entertainment value of the script, or the availability of good performers as much as the three points ticked off by my agent when he informed me of the audition, particularly the last point.

"Spencer has a great track record," he went on. "The networks all

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trust him. Practically every one of his shows winds up in the top ten. Lately he's had a couple of duds because he tried to get too arty, but this is more in line with what's selling right now."

The series was to be another of those half-hour sitcoms about a gruff, macho widower who was trying to cope with a petite, fetching, and somehow worldly wise teenage daughter with a penchant for one-liners.

To me the real value of the project was a chance to work with one of my heroes—Jerome Barkley. Barkley was a legend in theatrical circles because he had earned his considerable reputation without ever stepping in front of a motion-picture or television camera. He was accounted one of the greatest stage actors of the century, and everyone was shocked when it was announced he would risk his unique status by starring in a television situation comedy.

Some put it down to the economy giving Barkley little opportunity to display his talents on the financially risky Broadway stage, but credit also had to be given to the remarkable Mr. Spencer who had started in the business as an assistant stage manager in one of the star's earlier triumphs. He accomplished the doubly difficult task of selling his lifelong idol on doing the show and convincing the network to risk a major investment on an élite stage actor who was revered in his own circle but had no mass following to insure the cost.

"You got it," phoned my agent a few weeks later, his voice reflecting his own excitement. "You're playing Barkley's best friend. They're sending you the script tonight and the call is for ten o'clock tomorrow morning at Stage Five."

The studio had once been the location for countless wartime epics, South American-set musicals, and colorful historical romances during the heyday of motion-picture supremacy; but when I entered the cavernous structure of Stage Five that morning I saw the changes that progress had made.

On one side, comprising about one third of the entire area, were elevated rows of seats because the pilot was to be taped before a live audience. This left the floor on the opposite side for the main permanent set; cameras and microphone booms would be placed between the performers and the spectators who would mainly view the action from huge color-television monitors hanging before the seats.

That morning there were no cameras and the air resounded with carpentry sounds as the set was still being constructed. A long wooden table stretched along the middle area, covered with pencils

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and scripts. A craft's union man tended a refreshment table nearby, heavy with bagels, cream cheese, fresh fruits and vegetables, pastry, and a large electric coffee urn.

Barkley, a graying, middle-aged man who still preserved the trim physique and rugged good looks of his salad days, suddenly came into my vision. He wore a ratty sweater, held a paper cup of black coffee, and smoked an ancient briar pipe. After the initial palpitation that even actors feel when they meet a legendary star, I took his proffered hand and countered his kindly "Awfully glad to have you with us" with a stammering "It's a great honor for me to work with you," which he received with a broad smile, sensing my sincerity.

Spencer, as befitting his status, wore the only suit and tie among us and came across as a gracious and literate chieftain. He radiated pride whenever he gazed toward Barkley as if Barkley's presence reflected his own status as a producer who had not settled into the typical Hollywood herd of flesh merchants but sought instead for some element of excellence.

My attention then went to a small blonde young woman who sat conspicuously silent at the table, her eyes locked on her script. Her name was Alison Conroy, the actress playing Barkley's daughter, and I learned she was a recent graduate from some drama school and had no professional experience, having been selected by Spencer for both her cuteness and her innocence.

She treated Barkley with such reserve that it charmed him completely. Soon he was hovering over her like the father he was supposed to be, explaining every word of instruction from our youthful director, Dick West.

"My lord," he chortled after she successfully read her first line. "She's a miniature Ethel Barrymore. I shall have to be on my toes."

The read-through, some blocking, and individual health-insurance examinations took up our first day. Expecting all proposed series to run at least seven years, the network likes to make sure the cast is physically able to last that long.

My car was assigned a space in the studio parking lot next to Alison's, and after she bid farewell to Barkley I said to her, "Well, it looks like we're all going to have a great time. It's a wonderful company."

She nodded vacantly, watching Barkley's disappearing Jaguar for a moment, then muttered disdainfully as she climbed into her own VW, "It's too bad our star can't act."

That was the start of one of the most horrendous rehearsal periods

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I have ever experienced. Barkley soon became aware of Alison's opinion of his abilities and stopped trying to show even a veneer of tolerance for her inexperience. There were never any overt arguments, no shouting matches on the set, but the frigid atmosphere belied the loving father-daughter relationship they sought to convey.

To make matters worse, West, only a few years older than Alison and more attuned to her values, sided with his contemporary in the small war that began to rock Stage Five. Always soft-spoken and polite with Barkley, his lack of praise or enthusiasm and his doting consideration of Alison's growing number of problems made it plain where his sympathies lay.

Spencer tried to be diplomatic both because of his investment and his innate gentility but I felt he leaned toward Barkley. After all, the success of his pilot depended a great deal on the actor's appeal, and he still retained much of the hero-worship of his younger days.

My position was of one caught in the middle. Alison did not consider me a hopelessly outdated relic since I had once attended an acting school and had seen a DeNiro movie, so I was privy to some of her comments.

"Dear God, he's too much, isn't he?" she whispered to me as we sat watching Barkley do a scene involving neither of us. "I mean he's ruining the inner truth of that moment with his old hoke. My agent says this series could finally make me a star but look what he's doing with it." Quietly I mused that the length of her career hardly warranted the impatience and resentment I heard in her tone.

As for Barkley, he was aware that, outside of Spencer, I was the only one old enough to know who he was and soon he began inviting me after rehearsals to join him in a drink in a small bar near the studio.

"She pretends to be above such mundane things as technique like the rest of us poor mortals," he snorted over a Scotch and soda, "but the little fool doesn't even know how to open a door. I don't intend to let a little wet-nosed brat mess up a show of mine, even in this God-forsaken medium."

The final confrontation was not long in coming. The rehearsal period for a half-hour pilot is usually from one to two weeks, and just before the taping in front of a live audience, a special preview is given for the executives of the network as proof we haven't been wasting their money and also as an opportunity for them to pull out if so inclined afterward.

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West decided to add the idea of actually taping the preview, which is not usually done. I think he was worried about Alison, whose small voice and tiny gestures had trouble reaching the seats, while Barkley's stage-trained resonance could probably have been heard in Glendale without the aid of a microphone. Barkley sensed a conspiratorial ploy in placing cameras and sound equipment between him and his audience, but he kept his own counsel, at least until we met at the bar after rehearsals.

"So the two of them think they can get the best of me, do they?" he chuckled ominously. Then he raised the glass in a mock toast and added in the voice he once used as Brutus, one of his best roles, "She will learn. '*Between the acting of a dreadful thing and the first motion, all the interim is like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.*' "

And hideous it was for poor Alison as we prepared the next day to perform for the powers who would decide our fate. Sitting ashen in front of her makeup table, she trembled so badly she had trouble holding still while liner was applied to her terror-filled eyes. I thought for a moment she was going to upchuck when the floor manager informed us that we were only five minutes away from showtime.

Barkley, as was his custom, slept peacefully in the darkness of his dressing room until the call and rose with an exuberant air, stimulated and elated by the coming presentation. He grinned maliciously at Alison's petrified condition and made a florid gesture toward the direction of the seats, declaiming, "Our audience awaits, Madame Barrymore."

West gave him a murderous glare and tried to speak soothingly to Alison, who snapped at him in hysterical rage, "I'm all right! Leave me alone!" The great man's laughter was heard as he walked toward the set.

The audience consisted of network executives and their wives, all of whom knew their futures depended on the success of the series. Thus, they were an extremely receptive, almost desperately eager audience, and the half-hour script ran almost forty-five minutes because of their enthusiastic responses.

Barkley stole the show. He sneeringly gazed once at the rampart of electric machinery intruding between him and the spectators and then seemed to physically rise above it. Even when he couldn't be seen his powerful presence made itself felt to the point where nobody looked up at the monitors.

With me he was most generous, setting up my jokes to the point

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where they couldn't possibly fail, then stepping aside to give me full credit. This was my reward for the after-rehearsal drinking sessions.

At first he dealt mercilessly with Alison, overriding her restrained performance until it became obvious that the contest was tragically uneven. Then he backed off and feigned an exaggerated attempt to support her pitiful delivery. When it was over she ignored the charitable smattering of applause to retreat tearfully into her dressing room, leaving Barkley to savor the thunderous ovation he received. During the traditional period of congratulations he circled the tiny room set aside for refreshments like a conquering hero.

The next day everything appeared to have returned to normal, but there was an unmistakable attitude of condescension in Barkley's relationship with Alison and West. The youthful director, however, exhibited no resentment and went quietly about his work as if nothing had happened. Alison was withdrawn during the reading of the script changes, and when we broke for lunch I walked her to the food wagon parked outside the sound stages. After a bit of small talk we got down to the situation at hand and for a moment I thought her tears would return.

"I guess this isn't going to make me a star after all," she said lightly, her lips trembling. "Maybe I should just get out of the business."

I sympathized with her, remembering my own dismay at her age when I realized the American theater had not been eagerly awaiting my arrival. We returned to the sound stage to find it almost deserted. The union man had just prepared a fresh batch of coffee for this afternoon's session and I saw West sitting by himself in the corner going over script changes.

By this time Alison had sufficiently recovered to the point where she was ready to attempt a reconciliation with Barkley.

"Do you think he'd let me bring him a cup of coffee?" she asked timidly.

"I'm sure he'd love it," I smiled and watched her fill a container. It was such a nice gesture of recognition and respect that I decided I liked the girl very much as she disappeared inside Barkley's dressing room.

West turned in his chair and regarded her as well, his face taking on a resigned expression. Perhaps he felt sadly betrayed by her submission to their common enemy, or maybe he was wearily accepting it as part of Barkley's triumph. Just for a moment I detected

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a sense of victory in his manner as well, but before I could wonder about it I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"The show looked great yesterday, Lionel." I turned to see the beaming countenance of Carl Spencer as he came onto the stage from the outside. "The network loved it."

I nodded with appropriate enthusiasm but before I could reply he turned away abruptly and went over to West. "Hello, Dick. I didn't see you over there."

I left them in what appeared to be an important discussion of a production problem as Alison came out of the dressing room without the coffee container. "He was asleep," she told me in answer to my look. "I just left the cup on his table for when he wakes up."

Spencer paid her no attention and I guess she was glad of it, after yesterday's performance. Technicians came back and in about five minutes it was time to start the afternoon rehearsals.

West looked at his watch impatiently and barked to his assistant, "Go get the great man."

"I'll do it," I said quickly and moved off before he had time to object, which he appeared ready to do. Perhaps he was angry at my countermanding his order but I wanted to inform Barkley who had left the coffee and why before he came out.

When I entered I found the room in complete darkness, but I had been in there many times before and knew where the few sticks of furniture were located. As I headed in the direction of the lamp I was surprised to find myself colliding with what later I learned was a chair and falling helplessly to the floor. My temple struck the corner of the low table and a blaze of pain went through my head. The darkness was accompanied by a shower of flashing stars and all sounds ceased until I faintly began to hear a babble of voices and feel warm coffee being forced through my lips.

"He's coming around," echoed a voice and I dimly perceived Spencer kneeling over me, a look of concern on his face. I gulped at the liquid he offered and looked around at the commotion which surrounded me. After answering repeated inquiries about my health I was finally told that I had disappeared inside Barkley's dressing room for so long that West's assistant came to see what had happened. The man was more cautious than I was in finding the lamp, and when he turned it on he shouted in alarm, seeing me sprawled unconscious on the floor and Barkley apparently still asleep on his sofa.

The cry brought a crowd of people into the dressing room. West

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went to Barkley while Spencer, seeing I was injured, got me coffee. Then Alison began screaming. Barkley was not asleep. He was dead.

West carried her out of the place and over to the refreshment table where the union man was indifferently slicing carrots. Spencer promptly took charge and told everyone not to leave, or touch anything—he would call the police.

Their subsequent investigation put Barkley's death down as the result of poison—poison which was found in the coffee container that still rested on the table in his dressing room, half consumed. The police, as a matter of routine, had already taken samples of the electric coffee urn or what was left in it because practically everyone took a swig of the steaming brew immediately after the discovery of the body. That alone, besides their laboratory analysis, told them that the poison couldn't have come from the urn. It had to have been put in the cup after it was filled, and I don't have to tell you in what an unenviable position this placed Alison.

The investigators ignored my recounting of her reason for taking him the coffee and only considered what had been reported of her attitude before and immediately after her disastrous experience at the preview. To make matters worse for her, all of us who were present on Stage Five before the discovery of the body confirmed the fact that no one else went into the dressing room after Alison came out and that no one else touched the poisoned cup.

Then, to clinch matters, the union man, an individual of perception and good memory, swore that Alison had to break the unused plastic bag that held the coffee containers in order to select the one for Barkley, making it impossible that the poison had been planted in the container before the coffee was poured.

All in all, it came down to two theories, neither of them really satisfactory. One, that Barkley had taken his own life, waking up after Alison's departure, finding the coffee at hand, and administering the poison to himself. Even if such a sequence could be accepted, what possible reason could he have had for suicide? He was starring in what promised to be a spectacular success, with enthusiastic support from the network, and he had just vanquished a rival with a performance which all of us who saw it had to agree was superb.

The second theory held that Alison, in rage and hysteria over her professional humiliation, had killed Barkley for revenge, having obtained the poison the night before. Under the guise of seeking a reconciliation, which she hoped would remove all suspicion from

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her, she slipped the poison into the coffee on her way to the dressing room. Whether or not Barkley was awake or woke later was immaterial because the weapon had already been primed.

As for the idea that I poisoned the coffee, forced it on Barkley, then bopped myself on the head in the few minutes I was alone in the dressing room, I'm glad to say it was quickly dismissed, if ever entertained.

"Nobody knows what they're going to do about the series," my agent told me later, voicing what he considered the most important facet of the situation. "You'd better get a copy of the tape for your reel."

My reel is my personal video tape of past performances, and I had to agree that a scene between myself and Jerome Barkley might be very impressive. It was shortly after I got a copy of the taped rehearsal that the networks announced the reports of the insurance examinations had come in and showed that Barkley had suffered from an incurable disease that was expected to take his life within the year. His own doctor confirmed this and said that the actor had been living with this knowledge for some time.

The news removed the main barrier against a verdict of suicide and it was decided by the authorities that the despondency of imminent and painful death finally got the better of Barkley, and he chose to go out by his own hand during a moment of personal triumph. It cleared Alison who was again a marketable commodity for her agent. So it came as no surprise when I got a call from my own agent telling me that the pilot was on again. Spencer had found a suitable replacement for Barkley, a well-known television star without half of Barkley's credentials or talent but sufficiently "hot" to regain the network's faith in the project. The rest of the original cast, including Alison, was being asked to honor their contracts.

This was why Spencer was requesting I see him that afternoon, according to my agent, to get my full commitment. My performance had tested well with sample audiences who had seen the tape and I was on my way to my heart's desire—a regular role in a TV series. Even so, I faced the meeting with dread, having hoped that the situation would never have arisen.

Spencer's office was located in one of the rough wooden bungalows in the studio, with an interior that was plush and prosperous-looking, gleaming with plaques and statuettes that testified to the success of Spencer's past endeavors and cluttered with photographs of

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stars, political figures, and entertainment executives all in the process of shaking the producer's hand. Spencer was as gracious as always, calling me Lionel and commanding me to call him Carl.

"Jerry Barkley worked so hard to make this show a reality," he said in a subdued tone after we were seated, "that I feel it's a sort of tribute to his memory that we get it on the air. And now that things have cleared up for Alison, we'll have almost the same team. She's a talented actress and will some day be a big star. I'm sure of it."

"Yes," I answered quietly. "I saw the tape of the show and she comes across much better than I thought."

"I agree," he smiled. "I've been giving the matter a lot of thought since . . ." He sighed and shook his head as if to clear it. "You know, I just can't get that awful day out of my mind."

"Neither can I," I said pointedly. He sensed an extra meaning in my tone and looked at me sharply. I took a deep breath and plunged. "In fact, I keep going over it to find some logical explanation."

He stiffened and regarded me with cold eyes. "Explanation for what?"

"The coffee," I answered. "The coffee you gave me to drink after I passed out. I didn't think much of it at the time, but it was warm. Almost tepid. I had no trouble in gulping it down."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"The union man had just finished making a new batch when we got back from lunch and it was steaming-hot when Alison poured out Barkley's cup. The urn was still hot after we found the body, even when the police took a sample to test for poison. Yet the cup you gave me was only warm."

He tried to look impatient and his voice had a tinge of enmity. "Lionel, I don't know what you're getting at, but I have—"

I interrupted him, something that would have caused my agent heart failure if he had been present. "Everyone has gone under the supposition that the cup Alison brought into Barkley's dressing room was the one that was poisoned. But what if there were *two* cups? What if one had been brought in *before* Alison's? The fact that a chair was out of place indicates that Barkley had a previous visitor who pulled it up to the sofa to talk to him.

"Let's say this visitor slipped the poison into a cup of coffee when Barkley wasn't looking and quietly left, being careful not to let anyone see him. He had made sure his own fingerprints were not on the cup, and when Barkley's body was found the circumstances

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would point to suicide, even without a motive. Perhaps that could be supplied later—from an insurance report."

I glanced up at him but he wasn't moving a muscle now, or making any attempt to hide his hostility.

"The first visitor, having circled around and re-entered the stage, rushed into the dressing room with everyone else when West's assistant let out a yell. He must have been on the edge of panic because I had gone in earlier and never reappeared. On entering the dressing room, most of the attention was on me and Barkley, but there was one person who would take special interest in the fact that there were now *two* cups of coffee on the table. Where could the extra one have come from? Who put it there? Alison wouldn't have noticed it because the room was dark when she left her cup there.

"Well, our friend was now in a state of terror that something had gone wrong with his plan and all he could think of was that one of those cups, the full one, Alison's, had to be got rid of. During all the commotion he grabbed it and rushed back to the refreshment table on the pretext of getting some coffee for me. But the union man was standing right there, so he couldn't throw the cup away without being seen, and since it was full, he couldn't shove it into his pocket. So he pretended it was empty and faked filling it from the urn. Then he rushed back to me and poured the liquid down my throat.

"He could now do what he liked with the container, having established a reason for its presence. Later he learned how lucky he had been because nobody noticed there had been two cups on the table. The only thing that went wrong is that the coffee had begun to cool down, but who would notice that except the guy who drank it?"

There was a long pause. Then Spencer shook his head and sighed. "Lionel, you must be crazy. Why on earth would I want to kill Jerry? He was giving me my first hit series in two years. You saw how well he went over at the preview."

"Yes, but I also saw the video tape. It's a funny thing about acting. Its quality depends a great deal on where it's done. Barkley gave a brilliant *stage* performance that day for the audience in the bleachers, and they loved it. But it's what the camera picks up that counts in this business, and with the lens only a few feet away his acting seems embarrassingly exaggerated and gross. Yet Alison, who looked awful from a distance, steals the show on camera. Her tiny gestures and quiet voice are exactly the right level and even her

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nervousness and ineptness become endearing. *He* looks like the amateur in those circumstances."

To my surprise he merely nodded, all pretense gone now. "Yes. I felt terrible when I saw the tape that night. I wanted so much for Jerry to succeed but the network said they'd never pick up the show unless he was replaced. Unfortunately for me he had signed an ironclad contract, and we couldn't do a thing without his consent."

He looked up at me and tried to put a tone of appeal in his voice. "Lionel, you have to understand my position. We're being allowed fewer and fewer mistakes in this business. It's become too expensive. I had gone over my limit, and they all looked at my hiring of Jerry as proof I was finished, washed up. It was only because I was also responsible for Alison that they decided to give me one more chance, but only if I got rid of Jerry.

"I went to his dressing room after you all broke for lunch. I thought the stage was empty. There was no one at the refreshment table, so I poured out a cup of coffee for Jerry and took it in to him. When I pleaded with him to let me break his contract he became enraged. He said he wouldn't give West and Alison the satisfaction, that we were wrong, that TV was an illegitimate theatrical medium but he'd never pull out. What could I do?

"For the past year I've been dreading the end of my career and secured some poison I was going to use on myself if things got too bad. I had it in my pocket then, and I began to think: why should I die when it's all *his* fault? When he wasn't looking I slipped the poison in the cup and wiped off my fingerprints. He had started to drink it as I was leaving. I guess he then put out the lights and died in his sleep, never realizing what I had done. I hope so.

"Believe me, I never wanted to hurt anyone. That's why I got rid of that extra cup. I couldn't imagine where it had come from but I didn't want anyone else implicated, certainly not Alison. His death was supposed to be taken as a suicide and when they started to suspect her I didn't know what to do. I didn't know about the insurance report then. It had been a sudden impulse, and I thought I could work out some motive later. Thank God the report supplied one. I needed Alison for the series."

He laughed mirthlessly. "The irony is that his health problem was the very cause I needed to break his contract. And I suppose it explains why he was so anxious to stay with the show, why he switched to TV in the first place. He wasn't a wealthy man, and he needed the money a year's run, plus re-runs and syndication, would

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have given his family." He shrugged. "Of course I'm looking after them now. It's the least I can do."

Suddenly he straightened in his chair and faced me in a businesslike manner. "Now, what about you, Lionel? What's it to be? More money? Better billing? Have your agent contact me."

I looked at him in amazement. "Are you serious?"

"Lionel, everyone says this series could really take off. Dick West certainly realizes that. I saw him when I re-entered the stage after . . . after seeing Jerry. Dick knew I was going to try to fire Jerry. After all, that was his whole purpose in taping the preview. To show him up. I tried to find out if he saw me enter Jerry's dressing room since he was in that corner during the entire lunch period. It turned out he had, but he's a smart boy. He's never said a word, even when Alison, for whom he has some affection, was in danger. That's why Dick is going to go far in this business."

I turned and started out the door but the strident, vicious sound of his voice stopped me.

"Don't be a fool, Lionel. It's just your word against mine. And don't forget, everyone wants this series to make it. Even if the police believed you, where will you be? Out of work. Finished. A ruined career. Think about that, why don't you?"

I hadn't turned around but merely paused. Suddenly I was out the door and down the broad streets of the studio lot until I reached the little bar where Barkley and I had spent so much time. Sitting there, I mulled over Spencer's words. He was right. It was just my word against his. It might start inquiries in his direction but the industry was never cooperative when one of their own was being investigated. And they rarely forgave the one who blew the whistle, especially if he was an actor.

I did nothing that night, telling myself it was too late to begin anything. But when morning came I had come to a decision. Slowly, regretfully, I was reaching out to phone the police from the breakfast table when the news came over the radio. Carl Spencer, head of his own production company, had been found in the early hours by his housekeeper, shot through the head, apparently a suicide. On his desk he had left a full confession to the murder of Jerome Barkley.

There are two ways of looking at it. It could have been that his better nature had taken control of him, the one that admired Jerome Barkley's artistry and sought to create a worthwhile production bearing his own name. With this came a realization of what had

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happened to him during his drive for power and success, and in this one act he sought to clear away the unhappiness he had caused.

Or maybe he was just scared—scared of a struggling actor who shared the same ambitions but who, when faced with the same choice between success and self-respect, might not reach the same decision. Perhaps Spencer came to believe I would not hesitate in taking the harder but more honorable path. If that's true, all I can do is try to pay him the same respect he had shown me and believe that both these theories are correct.

But I *did* hesitate. Nothing can change that, and even if I tell you that I am positive I was going to phone the police, I'll never be able to prove it—to either of us. Barkley had quoted the line about the interim between acting a dreadful thing and its first motion being like a phantasma or a hideous dream, and I guess I'm stuck in that interim from now on.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MAYHEM BY MAIL

by M. EDWARD HOLDEN

Jack the Ripper, Sam the Slasher,
Carl the Crusher, and Bill the Basher
Have the package senders nervous.
All work for the Postal Service.

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"Miguel is a hard man. He is cruel to her". . .

OUTSIDE THE CAFÉ

by DEBBI MILLER-GUTIERREZ

The sun has gone down and Miguel is not here. We men open our second beers and drink them down thirstily. The heat of the sun is still with us, even if its light is not. Throats become very dry here on the desert.

Where is Miguel? He is usually one of the first to arrive, to stand in the cool of the oak trees outside the café, to drink beer and talk while the women do the weekly shopping. But tonight he is late. We shake our heads.

"Here he comes," someone says, pointing to the shiny brown pickup coming down the road. We know it is Miguel's. Only his truck is new enough to still have a shine. We relax. All the men are here now.

Miguel parks across the wide road, slams the door, and strides angrily toward us. His wife is left to get out by herself, though her enormous belly makes it hard for her. Amalia's baby will come soon.

Her long black hair falls across her thin shoulders and her hand rests on her belly as she steps down from the truck. It must be difficult for her, but she does not ask for help. She picks up the basket she will put the week's groceries in and walks up the road toward the market.

"Damn women," Miguel growls and takes a beer from someone. We do not ask his meaning. We know Miguel. He is not a quiet man. He will tell us. We wait.

"That Miguel," our wives say as they rock the sleeping babies, "he is a lucky man to have such a wife as Amalia. She is a good woman."

"She is the lucky one," we say. "Miguel is not a poor man."

Our wives look away. "Miguel is a hard man. He is cruel to her."

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"She should be quiet about such things," we say angrily. "Such a wife should be kept in line."

"She does not complain," our wives say quietly, "but we know," and they hug the sleeping babies tighter. "We know."

"Damn women," Miguel says again, and spits a brown stream of tobacco juice to punctuate his words. "They are always wanting something."

"Ah," we nod to each other in agreement, "how true."

Miguel empties his beer with one swallow, opens another, and speaks again. "If you give them one inch, they ask for a mile. A man cannot allow this. Am I not right?"

He waits for our agreement and then goes on.

"My woman," he grunts, "she is always wanting something. Is it not enough that she has the best house, the best truck, and"—he grins broadly and slaps his thigh—"the best man in the whole country?"

We do not laugh. Everything he has said is true. After all, Miguel has money. Amalia should count her blessings.

"But still she wants more," Miguel says bitterly, and lets loose another stream of tobacco juice. "Is this right?"

We all agree it is not and add our complaints about our own women. A young man, just lately married, steps out from the shadows of the café wall.

"What is it she wants, Miguel?" he asks. "Is it so unreasonable?"

Miguel is not used to being questioned. We can see his eyes flash as he turns to look at the young man.

"I suppose you would make women equal to us," he sneers. "Are you one of *those* men, Ernesto?" He takes another long swallow of beer and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. "It does not matter what she asks for. If I think it is unreasonable, then it is."

Ernesto steps back, startled by Miguel's vicious tone. No one wants to cross Miguel. We have seen him almost kill a man with only his fists.

Miguel goes on in a quieter tone. "You are young, Ernesto, and not long married. So I will tell you. See my truck," he says, pointing to it across the road, "see my shotgun in the rack there?"

We all nod. Miguel has one of the finest collections of guns in two counties. He always keeps his shotgun in his truck, loaded and ready for any small game he might come upon.

"Do you think that is too much to expect?" he asks Ernesto in a

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friendly tone. "For a man to have his hunting weapon near him, to be ready?"

Ernesto does not reply but sinks deeper into the shadows. He does not trust Miguel's amiable manner. It reminds him too much of the deadly calm of a rattlesnake just before it strikes.

"This is all I ask," Miguel continues. He is not talking to Ernesto now, he is making a speech. "Just to have my few possessions around me. I do not think this is too much to ask.

"My woman," he says, and his voice begins to grind, "she tells me that I must take my gun out of the truck. She says it is too dangerous to have around a baby. She says we may go over a bump and the gun will go off and kill us." He spits again and laughs with venom. "Stupid woman. I tell her the safety is on when the gun is in the truck. I try to be patient with her. I even show her how the gun works so she will see that what she says cannot happen." He throws up his hands. "But still she says no. Stupid woman."

Ernesto has found his courage again. He steps out of the shadows once more.

"But surely she is only concerned about the child," he says. "My Socorro is pregnant and all she does is worry about the baby." He stops as he realizes he has said too much, for Ernesto has been married for only a few weeks.

"Women should keep these fears to themselves," Miguel says coolly. "And what do I care of this baby? Amalia is a very bad woman. I think it is not mine anyway."

Someone laughs at this. "Amalia?" he says. "She with another man?"

Miguel turns on him. "Perhaps you are the one then. Perhaps it is your child, Alfredo."

His fists double and we can almost see steam coming from Miguel's nostrils. He reminds us of a bull ready to charge. Surely Fredo will back down.

But Fredo does not flinch. "I'm sorry your wife must find another man to keep her happy," he says with acid on his tongue, "but I am not the one."

"No," our wives say, "there is no other man."

"So you lie as well," we men say, and shout for another beer. "You sleep with another and then deny it."

"There is no other," they insist with quiet resignation.

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"Bad women," we say, and stumble to the bedroom. "No matter what we do you are not happy. Now come to bed."

Miguel looks as if he will kill Fredo. He steps quickly to take hold of his shirt. Then he says, in a voice sharp enough to cut out Fredo's heart, "Bad women are never satisfied. No man can change that."

We can hear the quiet snap of Fredo's knife sheath. We tense and are silent.

"Miguel is right," someone interrupts. Miguel slowly lets Fredo go and turns toward the speaker. Juan is an old man and we listen to him. Something flickers in Miguel's eyes for an instant. Could it be relief?

"These women," Juan says, "these bad ones. They always complain, like my first wife." He stops to look at us slyly for most of us did not know that he had been married before. We know only of pretty Rosario, thirty years younger than Juan.

He goes on when our murmurs subside. "My first wife, she ran off with a cowboy." He spits on the ground in front of him. "And I had given her everything."

Miguel nods grimly in sympathy, his back to Fredo, who straightens his shirt. Fredo's eyes are hard. He does not fasten back the snap of his sheath.

"Now Rosa," Juan says and beams, "she is happy with me." He winks at us and grins. "You know of my six sons."

Our women sit together on the grass and carefully strip the husks from the corn.

"How does Rosa do it?" one asks. "We are accused, yes, even condemned even though we do nothing, and she—"

"Her man is old," says another. "He does not want to believe it. She has borne six sons. At least they have his name. That is enough for him."

"She is bad," say the others with the bitterness and anger which comes with envy.

"What are you women gossiping about?" we demand from our poker game.

They shake their heads and stack the husks.

But we have heard.

We smile at Juan. He is an old man.

A hot wind springs up from nowhere and pulls a tumbleweed from

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the sun-baked earth. The dry tumbleweed rolls along the side of Miguel's truck and leaves long scratches in the paint.

"Damn it!" Miguel hurls his half-empty beer can at the weed, which rolls away into the dusk untouched. The can hits the side of the truck and puts a small dent in the door. The wind dies away.

Miguel kicks the dust and opens another beer. We shake our heads. What a thing to happen to such a fine truck.

Miguel scowls as he looks up the road. "Here comes my lazy woman. Look how slow she walks. Like a snail, she is."

We turn to see. She is coming very slowly indeed, weighted down by the heaping grocery basket which she balances gingerly on her swollen belly. She is heading for the truck, but Miguel calls to her.

"Amalia," he says easily, "come here."

Amalia stops and shifts the weight of the basket. "I will put this in the truck," she says like a question.

"No," says Miguel. "Come here."

Amalia comes across the road and stands in front of him. "Yes?"

Miguel turns and waves his hand toward us. "Tell me," he says, smiling, "which one of these is the father?"

Amalia looks at him in confusion.

"The father," Miguel repeats, "of your baby."

Her confusion turns to wonder. "Why, you of course, Miguel. You are the only one." She remembers us then and blushes to have spoken so freely. We shuffle our feet uncomfortably. She looks so small and tired.

"So you lie as well," Miguel roars. He shakes her so violently that the basket she is so carefully balancing spills to the ground.

"Clumsy pig," Miguel shouts, and strikes her hard across the back. He is sent off balance for a moment by the force of his swing.

Amalia is on the ground, scooping up the contents of the basket. She does not cry, but we can see her thin shoulders go straight and hard. It reminds us of something but we cannot think what.

"Take this to the truck," Miguel growls, and then to twist the knife he adds, "Bring me my shotgun, Amalia." He turns to us and grins wickedly. "I must make sure it is loaded. There are coyotes out tonight."

Amalia walks slowly across the road and puts the basket in the back of the truck. Then she lifts the heavy gun from the rack and starts back.

"Hurry up, woman," Miguel jeers, and struts away from us, closer

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to the edge of the road. "You are like a turtle." He turns to us to laugh. We look down at our scuffed boots.

We are looking at our boots so we do not see Miguel turn back. We do not see his smile fade, his hands go out.

We do not see these things but we do hear something—the roar of a gun and the thud of a heavy thing hitting the ground.

We look up quickly and see Amalia with the shotgun in her hands. Miguel is lying in the dust of the road and he does not move. We do not move.

Amalia closes her eyes as the gun drops to her feet. Then she turns away. But she does not hurry as she walks back up the road.

We move now. Fredo turns Miguel half over and then quickly back. We look at each other and then at Amalia's diminishing figure.

"Let her go," Ernesto says.

We falter. Perhaps our wives were right. He was a hard man, that one. It was not wholly unjust.

"No," Alfredo says, turning on us suddenly. "Miguel was one of us." He sends someone to get the sheriff.

We do not stop him. Now we remember where we have seen shoulders go straight and hard in just the way of Amalia's. Those could have been the shoulders of our own women a hundred times before.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Some Vietnam veterans came back whole, intact; some came back broken, in pieces. Here is the story of one Vietnam veteran who returned to face unbearable postwar pressures. He didn't do very well with his problem, but perhaps there were extenuating circumstances . . .

PAID IN FULL

by HUGH PENTECOST

My decision to murder Jerry Redvine was not a sudden impulse. It has been a daily possibility for a long time, but last week, when Bonnie Gleason checked out, there was no longer any reason to let that swine live another day. Bonnie had bought him his life for a long, long time, and now she wasn't around to negotiate for him any longer.

There was never any problem about how to do it. Thanks to the army I have been trained to kill. I was in a sniper company in Vietnam, and I got so good with a high-powered rifle with a telescopic sight I could put a bullet in a man's eye socket at a hundred yards and never miss. Redvine provided me with the place to do it and not be caught, his private beach on his estate by the ocean, with the roar of the surf cutting off any sound my rifle might make . . . if there was anyone to hear it.

They call Jerry Redvine a "macho man." I don't know what the word macho really means, but it's applied to handsome, vital, physically exciting males. I have to admit Redvine is handsome, with a magnificent, beautifully muscled body. He's a movie star, and that body, tanned the color of mahogany, and his bright red hair and

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dazzling smile are his stock in trade. His athletic skills allow him to play romantic roles involving hair-raising stunts.

A recent television talk show did a series on macho men, including such stars as Burt Reynolds, Robert Conrad, Christopher Reeve, Tom Jones. Jerry Redvine made them all take a back seat. I was once led to believe that he didn't really do the breath-taking things we saw on the screen, that stunt men did the tricks and Redvine just appeared in the safe closeups. I chose to believe that and it cost me . . . but that comes later.

It all began with Bonnie, dear, darling, lovely Bonnie. I was already in the army when I met her, stationed in California, waiting to be shipped out to Vietnam. There was a canteen at the base, where local gals came to eat and drink with us, dance with us, make us feel wanted and admired, and not shut off from the real world. Bonnie Gleason was one of those volunteers, and she came my way with her soft dark hair, her bright blue eyes, her impudent Irish face, and I fell so hard for her you could have heard the thud back home in Connecticut.

It was love, not just a physical attraction. I wanted her forever, and over a ten-day period I came to believe that I'd struck the same kind of gong in her. We managed to have everything a man and woman want together in those ten days, and we promised each other everything for the future . . . if and when I came back.

I wasn't to come back for more than two years. We wrote to each other regularly in that time, she twice a week, I when I could. My letters to her were passionate declarations of my undying love. Hers to me, after the first month or two, were less extravagant. It bothered me a little at first, but the letters came regularly—chit-chat about how she had spent a day, almost like a diary without any discussion of deep personal feelings. She didn't, I told myself, have the capacity for putting her love, her hunger for me, into words. Some people just can't say it in words on paper. They're self-conscious about it. It was enough, I told myself, that she never missed a time, never left me wondering at mail call if I was forgotten.

I was luckier than some. I was wounded out of the service after two years without being permanently maimed or crippled. At first, though, I was stuck in a wheelchair for several months, a spinal injury that surgery would cure after a fairly long period of recuperation. It was a small price to pay for getting back to Bonnie.

One of the great moments in my life was arriving back on United States soil aboard a hospital plane, being lowered in my wheelchair

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to the airstrip, and being pushed toward the reception area by a soldier. We could see the people waiting for a sight of their loved ones.

And there was Bonnie. I would have run to her if I could have moved out of the chair. I tried waving, and realized that everyone else who'd come off the plane was waving.

"See your girl?" Major Lipsky asked me. He was the army doctor who had cared for me on the flight home. I guess I'd spilled over to him about Bonnie.

"She's there!" I told him.

At last she spotted me. I hadn't told her about the wheelchair in my last letter. She raised a hand in greeting but she didn't come toward me. She must be shocked, I thought, to see me in the chair. She reached out to me as I got to her, and her hand was ice-cold.

"Fred!" It was a whisper.

I couldn't speak I was so choked up. I just lifted her hand and held it against my cheek.

"I feel as though I know you, Miss Gleason," Major Lipsky said. "Sergeant Schofield has talked so much about you. Don't be too concerned. He won't be much of a lover for a few weeks, but we're certain he's coming out of this a hundred percent whole."

Bonnie gave the doctor a little mechanical smile of thanks. I should have forewarned her. She was in shock, at the sight of me in the wheelchair.

This moment was to be only a brief interlude.

Those of us invalided home were to have an hour with friends and family in the airport lounge or restaurant, then we were off to the hospital for the home medics to go over us and our records, and to be debriefed by Army Intelligence.

I suggested a cup of coffee in the restaurant, and my chair man wheeled me there. Bonnie and I sat facing each other after we'd ordered coffee and Danish. She still hadn't snapped out of it.

"It's not the end of the world," I told her. "Once I'm out of this cast there'll be time to make up for all the lovemaking we've missed. My God, how marvelous it is to see you, baby."

"I couldn't write you about what happened," she said.

"Happened to whom?" I said.

"You were alone out there, no way to respond. I—I had to tell you, face to face, Fred."

"Tell me what?"

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A little nerve twitched on her pale cheek. "I'm in love with another man, Fred. I've been living with him for a year."

The words just didn't make sense, because they couldn't mean what they seemed to mean.

"I would give anything I know not to have hurt you," Bonnie said. "But it happened, that's all. It just happened."

The inside of my mouth felt dry as cotton. "Who is he?" I heard myself ask.

"Jerry Redvine," she said.

"The movie actor?"

She nodded.

"My God, Bonnie, he's had a thousand women! He can buy them by the carload! He didn't have to take you away from me. He didn't have to steal another guy's woman."

"He didn't steal me, Fred. I—I wanted him as much as he wanted me. It happened, that's all."

"Didn't what we had mean anything?"

"What we had was so quick, Fred, so marvelous but with no chance to grow any roots. I worked on a film with Jerry. It was—electric. Because of you, and all we'd promised each other, I tried to stay away from him. He tried to stay away from me, but it didn't work for either of us. What else can I tell you, Fred?"

"Why you kept on writing, keeping me on the hook!"

"It was crazy, I guess," she said. "You were fighting my war. I couldn't hurt you when you couldn't hurt me back."

"Well, I can hurt you now!" I said.

I leaned across the table and gave her a backhanded slap. She just sat there, a little trickle of blood running out of the corner of her mouth.

I spun the wheelchair around and pushed myself across the room, bumping into tables and people. I wanted to get a thousand miles away. Major Lipsky, attracted by the commotion I was creating, caught up with me at the exit.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?"

"She just 'dear John-ed' me," I shouted at him. "The little tramp is sleeping with a million-dollar movie star!"

"I'm sorry, Fred."

"*You're* sorry! She did it to me, not you, Doc! Me, me, *me!*"

I have to hand it to Redvine. He didn't back away. Late that afternoon he was suddenly standing at the foot of my bed in the

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army hospital. God, he was handsome. His red hair was like a torch on top of his head and he was blazing with anger.

"You hurt her, Schofield, damn you," he said, in a cold, flat voice.

"That's not much, considering what she did to me, what you've done to me," I said.

"You want to take it out on me," he said, "you're welcome. When you're out of here and back on your feet, just get in touch with me and I'll give you the chance."

"Surrounded by an army of your paid help?"

"Alone! You name the place and time." His voice suddenly shook a little. "But stay away from Bonnie! If you ever give her another moment of unhappiness I swear to God you'll wish you'd never been born!"

It was six or seven weeks before I was released from the hospital, and another two months after that before I got my discharge from the army. All that time I had only one thought. As soon as I was free and on my own, without army doctors or brass looking over my shoulder and running my life on a schedule, I was going to polish off Jerry Redvine.

It wasn't my intention to be caught at it, either. It was going to involve studying the patterns of his life. There must be some secluded place where I could count on finding him, getting him in the sight of my high-powered rifle, mowing him down, and walking away. I had no qualms about it. For two years I had been getting enemy men in the sight of my rifle and picking them off. I had never had any real pleasure in killing, but I would this time.

The time in the hospital and the waiting to be set free weren't all wasted. Jerry Redvine didn't live a private life. That was part of the business of making millions for himself and the studio that produced his films. There were magazine articles, items in the gossip columns, an interview on a talk show that I caught on television. Redvine was one of the last of the romantic film stars, in a class with the earlier greats like Clark Gable and Gary Cooper and Ronald Colman. He lived like a king in a million-dollar palace on the ocean. He owned acres and acres of land all around that palace and I gathered he kept himself protected against rubber-necking tourists; but surely I could find a way to get into that privacy for a chance at him.

One of the items that caught my attention in a magazine article was a picture of him surfboarding. He apparently took off from his

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house and rode the waves into a private cove and beach. He looked pretty sensational riding that board, muscular, as perfectly balanced as a ballet dancer, and naked except for swim shorts. When he hit the beach, I thought, he wouldn't be carrying any kind of weapon, any means of protecting himself.

It would be the perfect place to catch him helpless. It would be worthwhile to study that geography, that terrain, and determine what time of day he chose for this sport. It would be, I told myself, on a rising tide when the waves would be at their most active.

I had time. I was going to do the job perfectly.

Something got in my way only a few days after my release, something I hadn't remotely anticipated. I had quite a little money when I went into the army and when I came out I had no worry about how to live for a while. Some actor who was making a film in Europe had a little beach cottage down the coast about two miles from Redvine's estate. An agent rented it to me. I had to live somewhere I could come and go without a hotel clerk or a boardinghouse owner keeping tabs on me. It was expensive but it was exactly right for me. I got it for three months, which would be all the time I'd need to scout Redvine and finish him. I had to get a rifle and use it enough, unobserved, so that it became part of me. I got myself a second-hand Jeep which would take me in and around Redvine's estate over rough country.

The thing that got in my way was the sight of Bonnie. I read in the paper that there was to be a premiere of Redvine's newest picture at a Hollywood theater. All the film bigshots would be there, and of course Redvine himself. And a few thousand clamoring fans. I was curious, so I went.

They came, the stars and the near-stars, and the fans shouted and clapped, and crazy kids tried to crowd in to get autographs. Then the noise of the crowd swelled as a big black limousine pulled up outside the theater.

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!" some goon girl was shouting in my ear.

He stepped out of the car, wearing a dinner jacket, black tie and all. He waved at the people and then he turned back to the car and held out his hand to Bonnie, who joined him. She looked ravishing. She took his arm, looked up at him, and smiled.

They started up a roped-off alley that held the people in check. Redvine wasn't three feet away from me, protecting Bonnie from hands that reached out to them. I thought he looked straight at me, but the expression on his face was blank. He'd only seen me lying

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in a hospital bed. Then he spoke, quite clearly but not looking at me. I don't think Bonnie heard him.

"I told you, Schofield, you name it. Any time, any place."

He turned so that Bonnie was completely covered. I wondered if he thought I was going to give it to him right there. Then I caught a look at Bonnie's face and that's what jolted me. Her smile at him was radiant. "My God," I thought, "she loves him. *She loves him!*"

I didn't go into the film. Instead I headed for a bar across the street. What was bothering me was, I suddenly realized that if I carried out my plan I would hurt her almost beyond anything she could stand. Trouble was I loved her too much to want her hurt that badly.

Some jerk standing by me at the bar interrupted my thoughts.

"Great hero, that one," he said.

"Who?"

"Jerry Redvine. You know he doesn't do any of those acrobatics you see in his pictures? That's all doubles, stunt men. Pretty boy wouldn't risk getting himself hurt."

"How do you know that?"

"Hell, I used to work at the studio," the jerk said.

I filed that away for future thought. I had been trained in hand-to-hand combat where you knew you had to kill the other guy before he killed you. I had a feeling I could handle Redvine but good! Maybe that was an answer, to humiliate him, cut him down to size, put him out of work for a while.

There might be more satisfaction in that than a long-distance rifle shot which would be as easy as shooting fish in a barrel. But that way he'd never know what hit him, never know that I'd squared accounts with him. It was worth thinking about.

A few days after that movie premiere I made my way to the top of the cliff that overlooked the cove where Redvine did his surf-boarding. I'd checked the tides in a local newspaper. In a couple of hours conditions should be perfect for his sport if he was to have a try at it today.

It was rugged country. Far off to the right and at the end of an arm of land that pointed out into the ocean was Redvine's palace. There was no sign of life anywhere else. Down below was a white sand beach, and to the left was a reef of jagged rocks. They were visible when I first looked down there, but I realized that at high tide they'd be covered. In the old days of sailing ships dozens of them must have foundered and smashed to pieces on those hidden rocks.

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Redvine must head for the other end of the beach on his surfboard, I thought. To fall on those rocks could be pretty rough.

I sat at the top of the cliff, my rifle across my knees. I still might use it.

The waves rolled in on the beach, the wet line climbing higher and higher. The rocks to the left were a mass of foaming, angry water. In another hour there would be no sign of them.

I kept watching Redvine's palace. Maybe he wouldn't show today at all. If he was working on a film he wouldn't. Then, just as the tide was reaching its high point, the surf thundering, I saw two figures emerge from the house. They were just specks in the distance from where I sat. Redvine wasn't going to be alone today.

They started from some kind of float, riding their boards in toward the beach below me.

Just objectively, removing any personal feelings, it was quite a sight. Redvine and his friend were so damn good at it. They would disappear from sight and then come careening up to the top of a wave, a combination of some kind of circus acrobatics and marvelously balanced ballet dancing. Fifty yards from shore I recognized Redvine's partner. It was Bonnie! God, he had taught her well! She was almost as skillful as he was.

They came into the shore, racing each other. It was almost a dead heat when they leaped off the boards and onto the sand. Then, laughing, they ran to each other and into an embrace, their wet bodies held to each other. Then they moved above the water line and stretched out side by side on the dry sand, drying in the hot sun, hip to hip, thigh to thigh, arms thrown across each other. Then, God help me, they began to make love.

I rolled over on my face, pounding on the earth with my fists. That kind of love is what I had dreamed of for Bonnie and me, hiding in a stinking swamp in Vietnam. It wasn't fair! *It just wasn't fair!*

I stood up and looked down at them. They lay relaxed now and close in the sun. I don't know what I had in mind just then. A seagull glided lazily overhead on the beach. I raised my rifle and shot the bird. I was good, you understand. I got him right in the head and his lifeless body tumbled down through the air and landed only a few feet away from where they lay.

Redvine sprang up, went to the bird, examined it, and then looked up and saw me on the cliff. He raised a fist and shook it at me, and then he came up. I wouldn't have believed you could climb the face of that cliff, but he came up as though there was a path there.

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He stood in front of me, red hair matted down on his head, his eyes like pale blue flames.

"I told you to name the time, so you've named it," he said. "So have at me, buster!"

He faced me, hands raised in the position of an old gay-nineties boxer. It was absurd. He was going to be duck soup. I wasn't going to box the poor slob. I was going to give him the full Black Belt treatment. But as I made my move the comic-opera boxer opposite me vanished and he made exactly the right countermove. I felt excruciating pain as I went over his shoulder in a bone-crunching body slam to the ground.

So he wasn't so stupid after all! He knew the moves and countermoves, and in the next minute or two I found out he knew much more than I did and could execute the moves with a violence I couldn't match. I was spitting out teeth resulting from a kick to the mouth; my left arm was hanging limp at my side, the result of a savage armlock; my face must have looked like hamburger.

Suddenly I was down on my stomach, his knees in my back, and he was bending my head back with an arm around my throat. The end of that ploy, I knew, was that my spine would snap.

Bonnie was screaming at him to stop. Maybe she saved my life, because he suddenly let go and stepped away. Believe it or not, he wasn't even breathing hard.

Bonnie was kneeling beside me. "Oh, God, you need a doctor," she said.

I shook my head, and thought it might come off.

"Freddie, dear Freddie, please leave us alone!" Bonnie whispered to me. "Nobody meant to harm anyone. It's not my fault, or Jerry's fault, or your fault. It just happened. Please, please let us alone."

That terrible three minutes on top of the cliff changed things around for me.

I was six weeks with a chiropractor getting my back straightened out. A dentist had to make a bridge for the whole upper left side of my mouth. There were some stitches taken over my right cheekbone. And I had time to think.

I knew now there was no way I could punish Redvine in a physical encounter. If I killed him the way I could with my rifle, and got away with it clean as far as the law was concerned, Bonnie would always know. There was no way in God's world I could ever get her back. She was, still, all that mattered to me. The one thing I could

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do that made any sense was to protect her, to see that no harm came to her, that Redvine never turned his back on her. You could say I got sensible for a while.

Just about eighteen months went by. I went to the cliff from time to time at high tide and watched them on their surfboards. They never made love again on the beach. I guess they knew I might be somewhere around, but they were people in love, even a hundred yards away.

Then, one day, Bonnie didn't appear to ride her surfboard. He did it alone. He rode into the beach and some manservant from the house came and picked him up in a dune buggy. This went on, day after day, for two weeks. I became terribly anxious about Bonnie.

I saw in the paper that there was to be another premiere of a new Redvine film. I went and waited in the crowd outside the theater. At last the big black limousine pulled up and the shrieks of "Jerry! Jerry!" were deafening.

He came out, smiling and waving, then turned back to the car and held out his hand.

It wasn't Bonnie who came out. It was some tinsel blonde, all smiles and bulging bosom. Damn him, he had a new woman! He'd ditched Bonnie for somebody else!

There was no way to reach Redvine's house on the phone—he had an unlisted number. While he and his blonde were watching the film I drove out to his palace.

The entrance to the causeway was protected by a gatehouse, huge iron gates that were electrically controlled, and two armed guards. One of them, rifle crooked under his arm, approached my Jeep.

"I'm looking for Miss Bonnie Gleason," I said.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not permitted to give information about anyone," the guard said.

"Is she here?" is the stupid question you know?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not permitted to give information about anyone."

It was the old "name, rank and serial number" ploy. The same answer to all questions.

"How do I get permission to go in?" I asked.

"From Mr. Redvine or his secretary."

"How do I reach them?"

"At the studio in the morning."

"Look, just tell me. Have you seen Miss Gleason? Is she all right?"

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"I'm sorry, but I'm not permitted to give information about anyone."

I went back into town. When the film let out, a lot of the bigshots went to Romanoff's for a party. I managed to get a look inside. Redvine was there, with the blonde gushing all over him. The scum, I thought!

I went to the cliff the next morning. He didn't show. He'd probably been out too late with that blonde. I spent three days trying to get some sight of Bonnie, watching the goings to and comings from the palace. He came and went. He seemed to be having some kind of house party out there—familiar movie faces were arriving and departing.

On the fourth day I was getting ready at home to turn in for the night. I had my radio on with the nightly news. I'd been at the cliff each day at high tide, waiting for Redvine to appear. I'd get the facts about Bonnie from him, at gunpoint if I had to. That's when the radio gave me, God help me, my answer.

"The police report a suicide today in a roominghouse on the north side of town. A woman, identified as Bonnie Gleason, aged twenty-seven, said to be the live-in friend of Hollywood star Jerry Redvine, apparently died of an overdose of sleeping pills."

I sat there, turned to stone. He'd ditched her for that blonde and she hadn't been able to take it! After a while I got up from where I was sitting and began to check out on my rifle. High tide tomorrow was at eleven o'clock. He might come sweeping in over the waves then and I'd get him!

There was a little notice the next morning in the newspaper obituary columns. A funeral service, private, at a funeral home the next day. I found the place and waited in case [illegible] a single soul was there to wish her rest in peace. I [illegible] though [illegible] were not approved. The [illegible] and [illegible] she'd been with him for so long.

I tried to get in to the funeral home but was told it was to be very private. Nobody is ever as private as you'd like.

Every day after that I went to the cliff at high tide, but [illegible] approached. One day he'd come gliding in on that sail and I would nail him. Almost three weeks went by and he never showed. Well, I could be patient. It didn't matter when I got him as long as I got him.

On the twenty-second day after Bonnie's death, the twenty-second day I'd waited on the cliff, rifle ready, he showed.

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I could see him take off from the palace. There was something different about him as he swept in, riding one crest after another. He didn't seem quite as straight, as poised, as full of joy as he had on other occasions. He was coming down the left side of the cove toward the ledge of rocks, which was unusual for him. But there was no mistaking that carrot red hair with the sun beating down on it.

My plan was to wait until he hit the beach. His movements there wouldn't be as unpredictable as they were out there on the waves. Then it happened. For the first time since I'd watched him, he fell. It was a spectacular back somersault into the foaming area above the rock ledge.

He came up after a moment, standing almost waist-deep on top of the ledge. He kept tugging at his right leg as though he'd hurt it. He took hold of that leg below the knee with both hands and pulled with all his might. He straightened up, looked around, and began waving his arms as if he hoped to attract attention. There was no one but me to see, of course. I could see his mouth was open as though he were yelling for help.

A little single-engine plane flew overhead. He waved wildly at the pilot but obviously he wasn't seen. The water was up to his chest now.

I felt a great surge of excitement. The tide had quite a bit to rise before reaching its peak. If Redvine couldn't free himself from whatever had caught his leg or foot, he was going to drown, and I was going to have the pleasure of watching his last desperate struggle.

Inch by inch the water rose until it was up to his neck. I couldn't hear him over the roar of the surf but he must have been steadily screaming, flailing his arms. Then it occurred to me that if he couldn't see me he wouldn't know that I'd let him die when I might have saved him. I wanted him to know that.

I came out from behind the scrub pine where I'd been hiding, walked to the edge of the cliff, and stood there, straight and tall. I left my rifle in the grass. I didn't need it. Fate was doing my job for me.

The water was up to his chin.

And then he saw me!

His waving was frantic. His throat must be raw from screams that no one could hear. He put his hands together in a gesture of prayer. I stretched out my arms and gave him a gesture of both thumbs down, as the old Romans must have done to the Christians.

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He ducked down under the water, a last desperate attempt to free himself, I supposed. The red hair floated on the surface like seaweed. One hand came up in a last flapping wave and he was gone. Paid in full, I thought. *Paid in full!*

My tensions relaxed. I could feel my heart settling back to a normal beat. I took a last look at where he'd gone down and turned around.

And there he was, Jerry Redvine, sitting on a boulder not ten yards away, watching me with a cold smile.

"Don't even twitch a finger toward that gun, Schofield, or I'll blow your hand off." It was a voice coming from my left. I looked that way and saw Bill Zuckert, in a State Trooper's uniform, a rifle at the ready. Zuckert had been in Vietnam with me—one of my buddies. I knew how well he could handle a gun. I stood motionless, not believing, not understanding.

"Teddy ought to get an Academy Award for that performance," Redvine said.

"Teddy?" I heard myself ask.

"Teddy Baldwin, a stunt man from the studio," Redvine said.

"The hair?"

"A wig," Redvine said.

"We've been watching you for days, decided to force your hand," Zuckert said. He looked strange in a trooper's uniform. In the old days we'd been friends, good friends.

"Suppose I'd taken a shot at your chum down there?" I said.

"I'd have plugged you before you got your gun to your shoulder," Zuckert said.

I turned on Redvine. "You deserted Bonnie!" I shouted at him. "You drove her to killing herself, you and your blonde!"

He took a couple of quick steps toward me and I heard Zuckert say, "Easy, Mr. Redvine."

Redvine stopped. "You idiot!" he said. He was fighting for control. "That blonde has a role in my picture. Her being with me was a studio promotion. I'd been trying for days to find Bonnie. I had half a dozen private detectives looking for her, but they caught up with her too late. I didn't desert her, you creep! I loved her."

His voice broke. "She'd developed a terminal disease. She didn't want to face the pain, or the business of living with dying. She didn't want to become a shadow of what had been so precious to me. I would have gone all the way down into hell with her, but she wouldn't let me."

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He stared at me, breathing hard for a moment. Then he turned to Zuckert. "I guess we've seen enough, Lieutenant, to convince the court this crazy freak should be put in a padded cell for the rest of his miserable life."

"Start moving, Schofield," Zuckert said.

"Dear Manny Klein:

You asked me for a statement of exactly what happened, a confidential communication between lawyer and client. This is it. Surely the courts can't do anything to me, can they? I didn't kill anybody. Nobody died but poor Bonnie by her own hand. Nobody drowned. How can anyone prove I didn't know all the time it was a charade, planned and carried out by Redvine? Sure I was out there on the cliff for weeks, waiting for him to show. I had to know the truth about Bonnie. It was the only way I could hope to get to him. But I haven't done anything criminal, have I? Nothing happened except an Academy Award performance for that stunt man, as Redvine said. Thanks for whatever you can do.

Fred Schofield."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

SIN ON THE SEINE

by S. L. VARNADO

A wicked Parisian named Grime
Drowned his wife in the river one time.
But he made one mistake,
The clever young rake—
He returned to the Seine of the crime.

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Jeffery Rand, the Double-C man, now retired from the Department of Concealed Communications, faces an unusual code problem in an unusual place—an all-night talk show on BBC being broadcast, American-style, from the heart of London. . .

THE SPY WHO STAYED UP ALL NIGHT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand was at his desk in the little downstairs office that Leila had decorated for him when she came to the door to tell him he was wanted on the phone.

"Not London, I hope." He'd had a few months free of Hastings' calls for help, and he was deep into the memoirs he'd been promising to write ever since his retirement.

"It is London, but not what you think. It's Cap Curtiss."

"Who?"

"You know, Cap Curtiss, the American chap with the all-night radio show."

They'd caught snatches of it once or twice, generally on the car radio while driving home from a late party or a gathering at Leila's university. The show had never penetrated very deeply into Rand's consciousness, though he was aware it had a large following among insomniacs.

"Whatever can *he* want?" Rand grumbled, going to answer the call.

Cap Curtiss on the telephone was very much like Cap Curtiss on all-night radio. Though he'd tried to adopt some British mannerisms

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his voice sounded more like an American sideshow barker than a staid English broadcaster for BBC Radio.

"Mr. Rand, Cap Curtiss here. Perhaps you've heard my show on the wireless? *All Night Long With Cap Curtiss and Friends?* I generally have three guests in the studio and we kick around a variety of subjects from midnight till five in the morning. I'd love to have you as a guest next Friday night if you could make it."

"Oh, I'm afraid—"

"Before you decline let me tell you what I have in mind. My other two guests are Roland Nees who wrote that massive book on codes and ciphers, and Judith Fry who cracked the German codes during World War Two."

"Of course I'm familiar with both names," Rand said.

"The public is always interested in codes and spies and inside stories of wartime espionage. Judith Fry has never written her memoirs, and I believe she has a great deal to tell."

"The Official Secrets Act—"

"Oh, come now, Rand! We won't be getting into anything current. The war was a lifetime away. My God, Judith Fry is nearly eighty years old!"

"I've always wanted to meet the woman," Rand admitted. "She's something of a legend in the business."

"Then you will come! Good, good!"

"I didn't say—"

"Here's the format of the show. We chat back and forth for the first two and a half hours. Then we take a half-hour break at 2:30 and I have some Chinese food sent in. We're back on the air at three and we take phone calls from listeners for the last two hours."

"Look, this isn't really my—"

"We're at Broadcast House in London. Can you be there a half hour early next Friday? At 11:30?"

Rand surrendered. "I suppose so."

"I'll look for you then. Bye-bye!"

He was still standing by the telephone when Leila came into the room. "What was all that about?"

"I'm going to be on the radio," he said. "All night long."

Cap Curtiss came bounding along the corridor and intercepted Rand at the reception desk, giving him a vigorous handshake and leading him back to the studio. "Miss Fry is here already and I

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expect Nees to show up any minute. Say, you're a young chap to be retired from intelligence work. I expected someone older."

"I retired while I could still enjoy it," Rand said. "But I'm fifty-four now, so I'm not all that young any more. I always wanted to retire when I was fifty and that's what I did."

"That's good," Curtiss said. "Save it for on the air." He led Rand through a door and into a small studio where an elderly woman sat knitting at a kidney-shaped table. She brightened and smiled pleasantly as they entered. "Oh, you must be Mr. Rand. I've heard a great deal about you."

"Not nearly as much as I've heard about you," he insisted. "In my early days with Concealed Communications hardly a day passed without someone quoting Judith Fry."

He could see that pleased her. "It's good to be remembered by your colleagues. Though I told Mr. Curtiss here that I doubt the public even knows my name."

"We'll remedy that tonight," he assured her. Then, glancing out the thick soundproof window to the corridor, he said, "There's Roland Nees now. Pardon me."

Rand seated himself next to Judith Fry. Her white hair was carefully in place and her fingers moved quickly over the knitting. "You're very good at that."

"I find it helps my arthritis," she said. "At my age one has to keep the body active or it simply rusts away."

Cap Curtiss reentered the studio with a somber-looking man in a black turtleneck sweater. Rand recognized him at once from the jacket photograph on the back of *The Cryptographers' Encyclopedia.* "This is Roland Nees," Curtiss said. "I believe you know Miss Fry already, and here's Jeffery Rand."

"A pleasure to meet you," Nees said, not really sounding as if he meant it. "I wanted to interview you for my book but you were out of the country at the time. In Russia, I believe."

"No matter, it was a fine job." Rand was feeling generous. "I'm sure it's become the bible down at Double-C."

Cap Curtiss glanced at the clock. "Just five minutes to air time. We'd better all get seated. Talk into the microphone, but don't touch it and don't tap on it with your pencils." There were pencils and pads at each of their places. "I'll introduce you all at the beginning of the show, and then again at the start of each hour for those listeners who have tuned in late."

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A youngish man with sandy hair entered from the control room. "All set, Cap?"

"This is my producer, Glen Bridge." He introduced them all. "Glen's the brains behind this program. I told him how successful all-night talk shows were back in the States and he helped launch them over here."

Glen Bridge smiled. "People berate me for Americanizing the country, but I just tell them they don't have to listen if they don't like it."

Cap waved to another man in the control room—a balding fellow with a potbelly. "The other chap's our engineer, Eddie White. He keeps us on the air—or cuts us off if the language gets too rough. So watch your step!" He chuckled and added, "Though I guess you three aren't likely to give us any grief. Last week I had some punk rockers on and Eddie was working overtime bleeping out words."

"Is the broadcast delayed?" Rand asked.

"Just seven seconds. They wouldn't let us do it otherwise."

"Air time," Bridge said. "Cut the chatter, Cap."

Rand watched the red second hand move around the big studio wall clock. Then Eddie signaled from the control room and Cap Curtiss opened the show.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. From the heart of London this is *All Night Long With Cap Curtiss and Friends*. I'm Cap Curtiss and I think we've got a really fascinating show for all you late-nighters. Three experts on codes and ciphers are with me in the studio tonight, and we're going to have a lively time chatting about their cloak-and-dagger days. We'll be on the air with our guests until 2:30, and then after our usual half-hour break for recorded symphonette music, we'll be back on the air to take calls from our listeners.

"And now to introduce our guests. First and foremost is Miss Judith Fry, a legendary name in the annals of cryptography. Judith Fry began her career working with the Americans during the final days of Prohibition there, helping to crack the codes used by rum-runners. She also aided the Canadian government in breaking a complicated code used by opium smugglers in the late 1930s, before returning to England at the outbreak of the Second World War. Some historians have called her war work the most important single factor in the breaking of Hitler's codes and the duplication of the complex German coding machine known as Enigma. Judith, it's a pleasure to have you here tonight."

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She smiled and said a few words in reply before Curtiss moved on to the next guest. "Roland Nees is the author of a massive thousand-page study titled *The Cryptographers' Encyclopedia*. What started out as a hobby for Mr. Nees has grown into a full-scale occupation—the study of codes and ciphers and their place in world history.

"And finally as our third guest we have Jeffery Rand, former director of Britain's Department of Concealed Communications. Mr. Rand joined British Intelligence in the late 1940s as a young code clerk in the famous Calendar Network. He rose through the ranks to head up Double-C by the mid-1960s, a position he held for more than ten years until his retirement at the age of fifty. I understand Mr. Rand still performs occasional services for the British government on request. Is that correct?"

"They've called me back a few times," Rand admitted. "It's not unusual for intelligence agencies to rehire former employees on a contract basis. America's Central Intelligence Agency does it a great deal."

Cap Curtiss settled back. With the introductions out of the way he asked the most obvious question. "How has espionage changed—how have codes and ciphers changed—since the 1930s and '40s when Judith was active?"

"It's all machines now," the woman responded, still keeping busy with her knitting. "I wouldn't know the first thing about the computers they now use."

Roland Nees cleared his throat. "Of course the computers are, in a sense, merely an outgrowth of the one-time pads that came into use during the last war." His voice droned on, much like a slightly boring college professor's, Rand decided. He wondered if Leila, a professor herself, had the same thought at home where she was listening.

Rand was surprised at how quickly the time passed. It was one o'clock before he knew it, and Curtiss was repeating the introductions for the second hour. Perhaps Leila was asleep by now, though she'd promised to stay awake for all of it. Rand had set his tape machine to record the show and she had to change tapes for him every ninety minutes.

". . . must be one cipher you were never able to crack," Cap Curtiss was saying, as the hour rolled around to 1:30. "How about it, Mr. Rand? What was your toughest one?"

"I can say in all modesty that I was never completely stumped,"

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Rand said. "Of course I had the help of a fine group of dedicated co-workers."

"I don't remember being stumped either," Judith Fry said, "although those Canadian opium smugglers came close."

"How do you relax from such a grueling task?"

"I read Samuel Johnson's Dictionary," she replied with a little laugh. "And I knit. I love them both."

Shortly after 2:00 a.m. Curtiss suggested there were no further applications to be made of codes and ciphers in today's world. "I disagree," Nees said. "Back in the States companies are using a variety of coded video signals in pay-television systems. There are people in America trying to break these codes and unscramble the image so they can sell illegal equipment to non-subscribers."

Judith Fry nodded. "A man approached me just last month with such an offer. Imagine—a seventy-nine-year-old woman getting involved with electronic gadgets!"

"It shows that people still remember your skills," Curtiss said.

"It must have been someone who read about you in Roland's book," Rand suggested. "That was a remarkable chapter he devoted to you."

"But cable television is beyond my comprehension!" she insisted. "What sort of offer was it? Something illegal?"

"I don't remember the details," she replied, suddenly turning vague. "But I turned it down, of course. I'm too old for that."

Rand had taken the precaution of napping for a few hours that afternoon, but he was beginning to feel tired by the time 2:30 rolled around. Curtiss urged his listeners to stay tuned and get their questions ready, then settled back with a sigh as the microphone light went out and the engineer signaled they were off the air. "Now," he said, "that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Where's this food you promised us?" Judith Fry asked. "If I have to stay up all night, at least you can feed me."

Cap Curtiss chuckled. "You know, you're a lively woman for your age. I can understand people wanting to put you back to work. I'd hire you myself if I had any decoding to be done. Frankly, I was a bit hesitant about having you on an all-night show, but Glen assured me you could do it."

The producer had just come in, leading a pair of oriental men bearing cartons of food in paper bags. "Oh, sure," he confirmed, joining in the conversation. "I met Judith last month at a concert and poetry reading where I played the piano. I knew she'd be perfect for the show."

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Everyone helped themselves to the cartons of Chinese food and Rand was relieved to see he wasn't expected to eat it with chopsticks. Eddie White came out of the control room to join them.

"The symphonette on?" Bridge asked him.

Eddie nodded. "That'll put our audience to sleep quickly enough. "You'd get more questions with a livelier musical interlude."

"You want to play Top 40 like Capital radio? We get enough calls," Bridge said, munching on an eggroll.

The food tasted good to Rand that night. He sat next to Judith Fry as they ate, chatting about their decoding experiences. "I hope people still try to hire me when I'm your age," he said.

She brushed a wisp of gray hair from her eyes, like a girl on a date with a boy she wanted to impress. He remembered some of the pictures from Nees's book and knew she'd been quite attractive in her younger days. "I keep going," she said. "I keep my hand in."

"We all should do that."

"There's a difference, though. You're married, aren't you?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"I never was. Sometimes I regret it, but not often. It allowed me to concentrate my attention on the problems at hand. With a husband and a family I'd have been an entirely different person. I'd have led a different life."

"I can understand that, but—"

"It's almost three," Cap announced. "Finish up your food, please."

Judith Fry carefully closed her cartons. "Mine tasted *awful*," she confided to Rand.

Glen Bridge placed new cups of water at everyone's elbow and Eddie White gathered up the half-finished cartons of food. Cap finished his coffee and cleared his throat. Then they were back on the air.

The first caller was a man with a thick foreign accent. "I want to direct my question to Roland Nees," he said.

"Yes?"

"What is your opinion of the Shakespearean ciphers which seem to prove that the plays of Shakespeare were really written by Sir Francis Bacon?"

"The Shakespearean ciphers were discounted long ago," Nees said, using his most authoritative voice. "One can find possible ciphers in the daily newspaper if one looks hard enough and has that sort of mind."

Rand thought Judith Fry was looking suddenly tired. She took a

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sip of water but it didn't seem to help much. A caller came on with a question for her but when Curtiss turned to her for a reply her face was sagging badly. "Are you all right?" Rand asked.

"I . . . food poisoned . . ."

"What?"

"Electronics . . . he said not to talk . . . "

Rand look up at Curtiss. "She's ill."

Curtiss signaled the control room and said quickly into the microphone. "We'll return shortly. In the meantime we invite you to listen to a recorded interlude of symphonette music." The red light on his desk went off, indicating the microphones were dead. "What's the matter with her? Is she having a stroke?"

Rand bent forward and sniffed her breath. "I think she's been poisoned."

"Poisoned? On my show?"

Glen Bridge ran in from the control room. "What is it, Cap? Should I call an ambulance?"

Rand straightened up. "You can call one but it won't do any good. She's dead."

The detective in charge, Sergeant Kennerson, confirmed Rand's suspicions. "I'd say she died of cyanide poisoning, but we'll need the autopsy to be certain. Where's this Chinese food you were all eating?"

Eddie White looked nonplused. "I threw the cartons down the incinerator, just like I do every night. The cleaning people raise hob if they're still around in the morning."

Kennerson was younger than Rand, but he seemed to settle on him as the most likely one to question. "I understand you're in British Intelligence, sir?"

"I used to be. I'm retired now."

"Maybe you can give me the best account of what happened."

Rand tried, relating some of the on-air conversation and describing the break for food at 2:30. Kennerson turned his attention to Curtiss. "These two Chinese who delivered the food—are they the same people every night?"

"I suppose so. I don't really pay that much attention. They all look a bit alike, don't you know?"

Glen Bridge sighed. "They were the same men, Sergeant. From the Golden Dragon down the street. They're in here five nights a week, always the same two men."

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Cap Curtiss was pacing the floor. "Damn it, somebody at the restaurant slipping cyanide into the food! Someone who was listening to the show! But why?"

"They were afraid of what she might say," Nees suggested. Of all of them he seemed to be taking her death most calmly.

"No," Rand said. "They weren't afraid of her. Obviously only one carton of food was poisoned or we'd all be dead now. But how could the killer know she'd get it? They were passed out quite at random. In fact, we all chose our own."

Curtiss smacked his forehead. "They were after *me!* Someone was trying to kill me!"

"Calm down," Bridge said. "That's not too likely. There are six of us here who ate the food. The killer had only one chance in six of getting any single person."

"Maybe it was an accident," the engineer, Eddie, suggested.

"She didn't think it was an accident when she was dying," Rand pointed out. "She gasped something about electronics, about him telling her not to talk. She thought the food had been poisoned because of that."

"I'll want to hear a tape of the program," Sergeant Kennerson decided. "Meanwhile her next of kin should be notified."

"She has a younger sister, I believe," Roland Nees said. "They were living together when I interviewed her, and I assume the sister is still alive."

"We have the address," Bridge said.

Rand managed to get free long enough to phone Leila at home. "What happened?" she demanded. "They're still playing that awful music on the station."

"Judith Fry died. The police are here."

"Oh, no! It wasn't—?"

"I'm afraid so. You might as well go to bed. I may not be home for a while."

The sergeant was waiting for Rand in the hall. "I've been on the telephone myself, sir, to a gentleman named Hastings."

"Ah, yes. I used to work for him."

"He says I should cooperate fully with you in the investigation."

"Just what made you telephone Hastings?"

"It seems like a national-security matter to me, sir. From what you've all been telling me, she might have been killed by enemy agents."

"Why would enemy agents murder a seventy-nine-year-old woman

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who hasn't worked for the government to any great extent since the Second World War?"

"You tell me, sir."

"I'll try to," Rand said.

"Then try this too. The dead woman carried an appointment book in her purse. As you might expect from a woman her age, it isn't too full of engagements—a luncheon here and there, about every other week. That type of thing."

Rand saw what the man was getting at. "But she mentioned a man who approached her just last month with an offer. If we could find that in her appointment book—"

"Oh, it's here all right—on the tenth of last month. But she's written the name in some sort of code."

"What?"

"Look for yourself."

He held out the small leather-bound pocket diary and Rand read the notation in Judith Fry's shaky hand. *Lunch with Gleek. Electronics.*

"Gleek?" Rand repeated.

"Gleek."

Rand turned a few of the weekly pages with his finger until he came upon today's date. *Futile Swarm*, the book read. "It's something, all right. Her own private shorthand system, I suppose."

"Do you go along with the idea the poison was meant for someone else?" the detective asked Rand.

"No."

"If Judith Fry was the intended victim, you know what that means."

Rand nodded. "The poison couldn't have been put in the food at the Chinese restaurant. It had to be done here in the studio."

"By one of you five people."

"Correct." He looked at the appointment book again. "So perhaps *Gleek* refers to one of us. The first three letters are the same as Glen Bridge's name. It has the same double-e as Nees. And of course in a simple substitution cipher the double-e could stand for the double-d in Eddie or the double-s in Curtiss."

"So it could be any of them?"

Rand smiled. "There's even a double-f in my first name."

"Now you're merely playing games."

"Cryptography is game-playing, to a large extent. Why else should this old woman bother to enter appointments in her book in code?

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Who did she think would ever see it, or care? But her life had been devoted to secret writing and she couldn't break the habit."

"So we're left with Gleek, which could be any of them."

"But only one of them had the motive, Sergeant. If we find the one involved with an electronics scheme that needed Judith Fry's help, we'll have our killer."

"Why would she taunt him like that, mentioning the scheme on the air?"

"She only hinted at it, really. It was more game-playing, I suppose, only this time it cost Judith Fry her life."

Rand left the sergeant and went back into the studio. Curtiss and Bridge were arguing about whether they should come back on the air with an announcement or merely let the music play and explain the whole thing on the next broadcast. Finally Curtiss' view prevailed and he returned to the microphone to make a brief announcement. Rand stood at the kidney-shaped desk watching him, seeing the pads and pencils by each of their places, the coffee cup at Cap's elbow, the paper cups of water by his place and Nees's. He thought it was too bad Judith Fry hadn't lived long enough to write the name of her killer on the pad.

The microphone light went on and Cap Curtiss said, "Good evening again, ladies and gentlemen. I'm very sorry for the curtailed show this evening, but it was unavoidable. One of our guests, Miss Judith Fry, was stricken during the last segment and was in need of urgent medical attention. In view of that, we are bringing you recorded music for the balance of the hour until five o'clock. But we'll be back on Monday with our regular show. Good morning from Cap Curtiss and friends!"

When he was off the air, Curtiss explained, "I didn't mention her death, in case the police haven't yet notified her sister."

Bridge, coming out of the control room, agreed. "I don't think it was necessary now, but there's no harm done. You can tell the whole story on Monday."

Rand wandered into the control room, where Eddie White was playing the symphonette recording. "They can all go back to sleep now," he said. It was just 4:30.

"Do you chaps have much contact with the visual end?" Rand asked. "Cable television systems and the like?"

"That's not here, that's America," the engineer replied. "Sure, we all look to get into video because that's where the real money is. All of us except Cap, that is. He's content with radio."

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Rand glanced through the thick glass window and saw Roland Nees slipping into his coat. He hurried out to intercept the man. "Are you leaving now?"

"I thought I would. I've told the police what little I know."

"How about telling me something before you go? When you interviewed Judith for your book, did she ever mention anything about cryptographic pay-television systems?"

"No, the subject never came up."

"But someone like Judith could be a big help in deciphering such a system?"

"Oh, certainly! Despite her age her wits were very sharp. In fact, if I were an American aiming to break one of the cable-television systems over there, she's exactly the sort of person I'd approach. She would be an ocean away from the scene of the crime, so to speak, and elderly enough so she wouldn't be around long to talk about it."

"Exactly what would they have wanted her to do?"

"Depends on the system. Some years ago Zenith had a system that used five decoder knobs with seven positions each. That's over sixteen thousand possible positions. The company would mail a card with the correct settings to subscribers, and the sets were wired differently so you couldn't use a neighbor's setting on your TV. But by comparing a few past settings a cipher expert could quickly figure the thing out. Other systems use scrambling devices and here too a cipher expert could be a big help."

Rand nodded. "Someone approached her and she turned him down. Tonight on the show she told about it and he was afraid she might tell more during the question period so he killed her."

"Do you mean one of us?" Nees asked.

"Of course. Haven't you known that all along?"

"Ourlios is an American. He'd have ties to American TV."

"So might Bridge or Wyatt, for you, for that matter. Does the name Gleek mean anything to you?"

He seemed truly puzzled. "Should it?"

"It may have been Judith. Her's name was not Killer."

Sergeant Kennerson came along then. "Everybody can go home. We can't hold these people any longer."

Roland Nees headed for the door and Rand said, "It seems odd that the killer would have cyanide available for a spur-of-the-moment murder like this. It's not something people carry around in their pockets."

Nees heard him and paused at the door. "But some people do.

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Rand. You know that as well as I do. Agents operating in enemy territory often carry cyanide capsules. I understand some IRA terrorists even carry them."

Something flickered in Kennerson's eyes. "Cap Curtiss had an IRA man on the show last year. Got himself in a peck of trouble over it. We've got the man in prison now on a bombing charge."

"Let's go talk to Curtiss," Rand suggested.

Curtiss was storing his notes in a briefcase and getting ready to leave. He frowned when Kennerson mentioned the IRA interview. "Let's not go through all that again. It was a year ago, for God's sake!"

"Did the man discuss cyanide capsules with you, sir?"

"No, he did not."

Glen Bridge came out of the studio carrying some paper cups and crumpled pieces of paper for the incinerator. "What's the trouble now?" he asked.

"They're dredging up that IRA business again," Curtiss complained.

Bridge shook his head and kept walking. "Sergeant, if you ask my opinion, I think the woman killed herself. She probably—"

"Samuel Johnson," Rand said.

They all looked at him oddly. "What's that?" the detective asked.

"She told us she enjoyed reading Johnson's Dictionary. Don't you see? Gleek and futile and swarm aren't really code words at all. They're words from Samuel Johnson's Dictionary!"

Glen Bridge pulled open the metal door of the incinerator chute. "I don't see what that has to do with anything. Does it tell us who killed her?"

Rand took a deep breath and sprang forward. He collided with Bridge and they both went down, the rubbish scattering across the floor. "Here's your killer," Rand called out to Kennerson. "See those paper cups? One of them will have traces of cyanide in it."

Glen Bridge sat handcuffed, refusing to talk, while Rand rummaged through the broadcast House library until he came up with a copy of Johnson's dictionary. "There it is!" he declared triumphantly. "Her name, Fry, meant 'swarm' back in Sam Johnson's day, and 'futile' meant 'talkative.' When she wrote 'futile swarm' she simply meant 'talkative Fry,' reminding her she'd be on Cap's talk show tonight."

"And 'gleek' means?" Kennerson asked.

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" 'Gleek' in those days meant a musician."

"Musician?" The detective looked puzzled.

"Remember Glen Bridge told us he met Judith Fry at a concert and poetry reading where he played the piano. Her first knowledge of him was as a musician, and that's how she noted it when he asked her to have lunch and discuss his electronic decoding scheme."

"All this from Johnson's Dictionary?" the detective asked.

"I didn't really need the dictionary clue to tell me Bridge was the killer."

The handcuffed producer looked interested for the first time, but it was Cap Curtiss who spoke. "How'd you know the poison was in the water cup and not in the Chinese food?"

"Because cyanide kills almost instantly, within seconds," Rand explained. "That's why spies and terrorists carry it as a suicide capsule. Now think back to this night's events. We had the Chinese food, Judith Fry complained it didn't taste good, the show went back on the air, you re-introduced us as you did each hour, a man with an accent called to ask about Shakespeare, and you were actually answering a second call before she really took ill. I saw her sipping water just before she collapsed. If the poison was cyanide it had to be in the water, not in the food which she'd finished eating more than ten minutes earlier. And I could rule out the food for another reason. We all chose our own cartons at random and she sat with me while she ate it. No one had an opportunity to poison it without my seeing something suspicious."

"And the water?" Kennerson asked.

"I remember Glen Bridge putting the cups at our places just as the break ended. Later, while Cap was announcing her illness, I noticed there were only two cups on the desk, by Nees's and my places. The cup Judith had used was missing. Bridge took it after she died, of course, so we wouldn't detect the odor of cyanide and realize the truth about the poisoning. He was on his way to casually drop it down the incinerator just now when I grabbed him."

Kennerson was busy making notes. "You want to talk about it?"

"Not without my lawyer," Glen Bridge answered.

"Check his American contacts," Rand suggested. "See if he was tied in with any cable television people over there. I think you'll find he was, and that he killed Judith Fry to keep her from talking about it. The paper cup still smells of bitter almonds and I'm sure you'll find traces of cyanide in it. Talk to this IRA terrorist you have locked up. I'm sure he'll tell you he gave Bridge a suicide capsule

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when he appeared on the show last year. A fatal souvenir that Bridge probably kept in his desk without ever mentioning it to anyone."

"So she was wrong about the food being poisoned," Kennerson said.

Rand nodded. "It simply disagreed with her. She was tired and her stomach was upset, but it was that one sip of water that killed her."

The sun was rising as Rand drove home through the English countryside. He couldn't remember the last time he'd stayed up all night.

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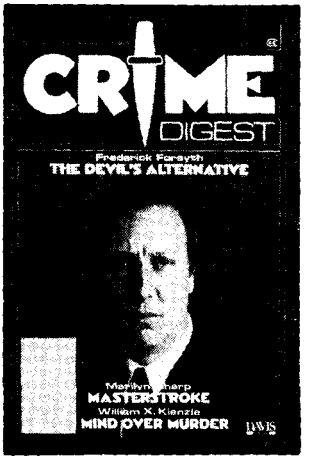

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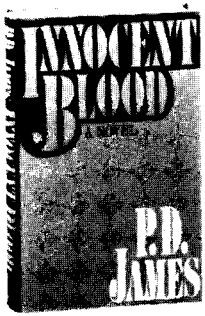

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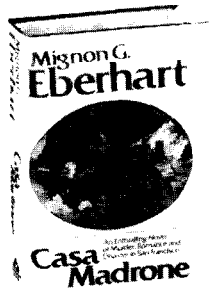

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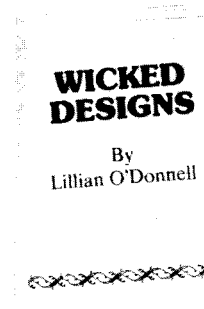

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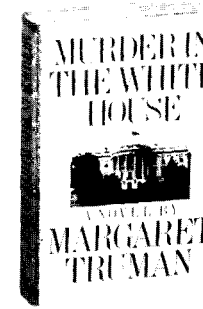

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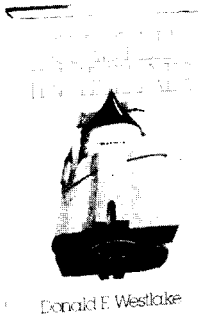

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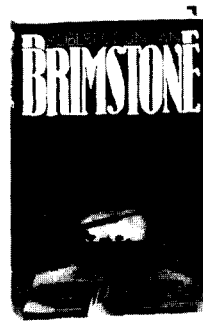

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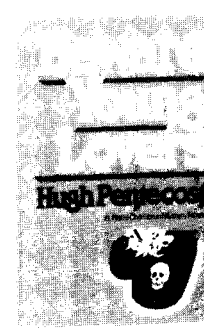

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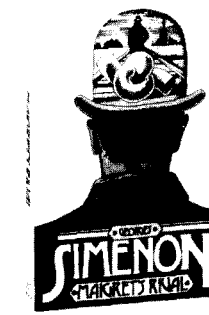

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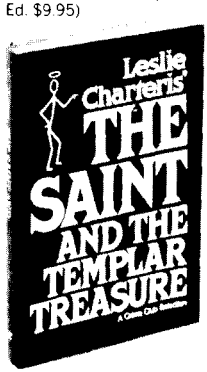

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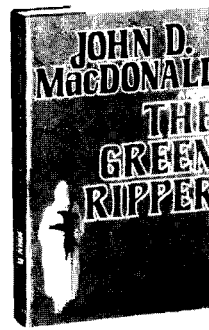

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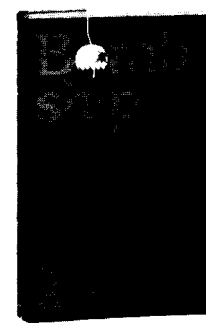

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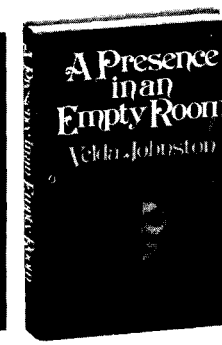

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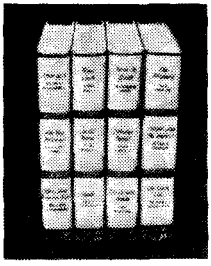

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